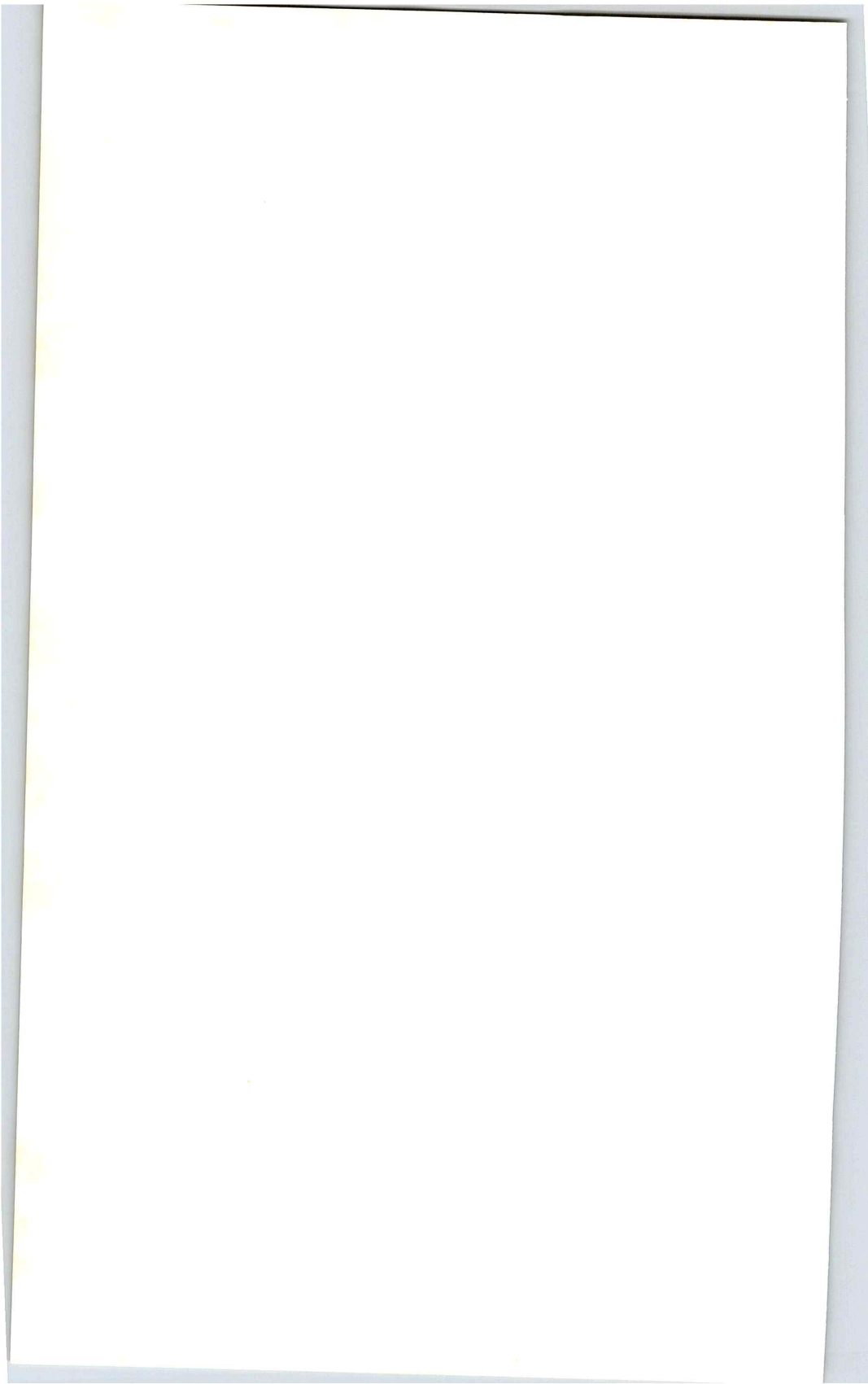


G. C. Dunstun '70



AGAINST THE WIND



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The Story of
the
New Zealand Seamen's Union

by
CONRAD BOLLINGER



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FOREWORD

The New Zealand Seamen's Union is proud to publish this very competent and comprehensive history of its organisation and achievements.

We believe that we have an obligation to know about our own past, because we have a lot to learn from it. The way Con Bollinger has turned those shelves and cupboards full of dusty papers of ours into a racy narrative, full of stirring episodes, might suggest to other organisations of the Labour movement what a useful exercise it would be to record the story of their own struggles.

It shows that history is not necessarily a dry list of dates and facts. It's a dramatic story of people, of conflict and change. It helps us to appreciate not only the struggles of those who won the conditions we enjoy today, but the need for maintaining our organisation in readiness for struggle to maintain and improve those conditions. For, like all history, the saga of our own union teaches that nothing worth having was ever won without struggle; nothing was ever handed out by the employing class from the generosity of its heart. Every penny added to wages, every square foot of crew accommodation, and every egg on the menu had to be argued, haggled, and fought for.

This is what trade unionism is all about. That is why I hope many of our younger members will read this book, because it explains the need for a union better than I could do.

In introducing *Against the Wind* to our members and the public, I would like to pay a special tribute to the old-timers whose courage and determination are enshrined in the pages that follow. I hope this book inspires the unionists of today by the example of those who went before, and I hope it helps to raise again the vision of those battlers of long ago to win a better life for the toilers of the world, the vision of peace, freedom, and socialism.

WM. MARTIN
National President,
New Zealand Seamen's Union.

Wellington, Sept. 1968.

BY WAY OF DEDICATION

Yet, Freedom, yet, thy banner torn but flying
Streams like the thunder-storm against the wind;
Thy trumpet-voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind.

— GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON

(in "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*", 1818)

Not the ruler for me, but the ranker, the tramp of the road,
The slave with the sack on his shoulders pricked on with the
goad,
The man with too weighty a burden, too weary a load.
The sailor, the stoker of steamers, the man with the clout,
The chantyman bent at the halliards, putting a tune to the shout,
The drowsy man at the wheel and the tired look-out.

— JOHN MASEFIELD

(in "*A Consecration*", 1911.)

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1.

SONS OF THE SEA

New Zealand, when all is said and done, is a couple of islands stuck away by themselves, surrounded by nothing but ocean.

Ships, and the men who sailed them, have always been important to this country. No one ever came here without crossing the sea, and the two races which have largely gone into the making of our nation both came from other island homes where they were famous among their neighbours as sailors. The Maoris have been called the "Vikings of the Sunrise", and the British have claimed the title of "Rulers of the Waves".

Favoured by a temperate climate and fertile soil, our islands have long been able to produce much more of the things that come directly from the soil than we could consume: and the industrial countries on the other side of the world have long taken advantage of this to use us as a convenient source of wool, meat, and dairy produce, and as a market for their own manufactured products. The whole process of trade, travel, and communication between our country and abroad, and between the different parts of our islands themselves, has required the crossing of hundreds and thousands of miles of sea: and for most of our history the only way to cross the sea has been by ship.

This is why the names of ships occur so frequently on the pages of our nation's history. The *Tainui* and the *Arawa* (according to legend) brought the great Maori migration from the north, centuries ago; the *Zeehan* and the *Endeavour* brought the first European explorers in the 1600s and 1700s; whaling and trading ships opened the land to increasing contact with the rest of the world from the 1790s; and from 1839 on, the *Aurora*, the *Philip Laing* and the *Charlotte Jane* brought the pioneer settlers who provided the first European strands of our bi-racial society. Since then, in peace and war, in prosperity and depression, ships have kept up the vital flow of goods and passengers between our ports, and between us and the rest of the world.

At first they sailed under canvas, dependent on the wind and the skill of the sailors in harnessing it. Then came the first steamers, coal-burning, with men in the stokehold shovelling round the clock to feed the boilers. And finally came the oil-burners, cleaner and less exhausting for the crew, but calling for increasing skill to maintain faster and more efficient services.

The men who provided the labour and the skill to drive those ships don't often receive a mention in the history books: but this book is solely about them, and the conditions they work under and the wages they worked for, and their struggle to improve those wages and conditions and their status in the community. It is the story of industrial organisation among New Zealand seafarers — the story of the New Zealand Seamen's Union.

Seamen are popularly thought of as tough. It isn't long since conditions at sea were so tough that only the toughest could survive. There was keel-hauling, and flogging; focsles awash in heavy seas; long hours of hard work, scrappy meals, and a short sleep in a bunk (or hammock) still warm from the body of the man who'd gone to take your place on watch; quarters too hot or too cold to be comfortable according to the weather and the latitude, not too clean, and probably ankle-deep in bilge so that you couldn't keep your tobacco dry, let alone your trousers.

Those conditions have gone, and it is largely due to the Union and the recognition that seamen are human which has come through their united strength in their Union, that has been responsible for getting rid of them. But there are still things in the life of the seafaring wage-earner which his fellow-worker ashore would never put up with. He spends days, often weeks and months, away from home; he signs a contract to serve the ship's owners for a specified period, with the threat of an unfavourable discharge if he displeases them; he signs away his nominal liberties as a citizen to complete subordination to the ship's master while the ship is at sea; he is on call to turn to in an emergency for twenty-four hours of the day; and there hangs over him all the time — now, as the fate of the *Kaitawa* in 1966 and the *Wahine* in 1968 so grimly reminded us, no less than in the days of the square-rigged schooner — the constant peril of the unexpected, the sudden mishap, the disaster that could cost him his life.

These are the things that have made seamen tough. They are also the things that have built up their organisation into a

tough and militant one, prepared to bargain hard for its members. In the course of nearly a century of organised effort, sporadic at first, but continuous since the early 1880s, the seamen of New Zealand have managed to better their lot very substantially — but the progress has been slow and gradual. The history books sometimes give you the idea that we live better than our grandfathers because employers have become kinder and there has been a sort of slow distilling of sweetness and light for the benefit of all.

The story of the New Zealand Seamen's Union will show you just how wrong this notion really is. New Zealand's seafarers have never obtained anything from their masters for which they were not prepared to struggle. Several times over the years, and for many bitter months in 1890, 1913, 1922, 1933, and again in 1951, the Union had to lead all its members out on strike to enforce a point of principle — and not always with success. The path of progress has been uneven, and we have had our defeats and reverses as well as our undoubted victories.

Still, looking back over the years to the wages and conditions of the New Zealand seaman of the days before there was a union in the industry, and comparing them with those of the New Zealand seaman today, we can judge the true worth of the Union: the contribution it has made to our present, and the promise it holds for our future.

2.

LAUNCHING A UNION: the 1870s and 1880s

The continuous history of the New Zealand Seamen's Union goes back no earlier than 1880. Even taking account of any earlier recorded moves to get a union under way in the industry, the story can be traced no further back than the 1870s. In other words, organized European settlement had been established in New Zealand for 40 years before the present Union was founded, and apparently more than 30 years before anyone seriously attempted the job.

The reasons for the time-lag are not far to seek. Those thirty or forty years of our history were our formative years as a nation. Mass immigration from Britain was organised by land-speculators interested firstly in a quick quid, secondly in relieving Britain of surplus population and transplanting a "vertical slice of society" from the old world to the new so that New Zealand would grow into a replica of the country whose dust most of the settlers had shaken off their feet only too willingly.

The majority of these people — tradesmen, labourers, and useful folk of all kinds — came to this land seeking a better life than the drabness, degradation, and recurrent unemployment they had left behind. Many of them had taken part in the radical agitation which had swept Britain in the 1830s — the years of Chartism, the Reform Bill, and Robert Owen's pioneer Trades Union movement.

Some of them saw migration as a different way of achieving the old radical objectives. Within weeks of landing on Petone Beach in 1840, one determined carpenter called Sam Parnell had established the unheard-of principle of an 8-hour working day in the building industry. Within a year, gangs of workers on the Hutt Road had struck to obtain the same conditions for labourers. Unemployed workers on relief in New Plymouth and Nelson went on strike and presented sharply worded demands to the speculator-organisers of the colony for the fulfilment of their golden promises. . . .

But others joined the land-speculators' gravy-train, following policies which led inevitably to bitter warfare with the Maoris.

The tribal culture of the Maoris had no conception of the sale and purchase of land, and though they had welcomed the pakeha as a partner from whom they had much to learn, they grew alarmed at the speed with which their best land was swallowed into the baffling pakeha system, often to mint easy fortunes for a few. There was a brief period of equilibrium when the Maoris, adapting their tribal organisation to the economics of the white man's society, ran flourishing communal farms, saw-mills, and even shipyards, to bring produce to the pakeha settlements. Maori crews were often envied by those on the pakeha coasters, for the tribal concept meant a communal sharing of profits and the discipline of the lash was replaced by the inducement of economic returns for labour. But they were soon overpowered by the greedy dynamics of the pakeha economic system, whose military juggernaut ensured the suppression of this hopeful experiment in cultural and economic partnership between the races, and imposed capitalism on both of us.

In the postwar period of the sixties and seventies, the pakeha shipping trade underwent considerable stimulus from the need to fill the vacuum left on the coast by the smashing of the Maori economy, and to meet the expanding needs of a boom in conquered land and the produce of the land, intensified by a series of gold rushes and a Government policy of improving land communication by a crash programme of building roads, railways, bridges and telegraphs.

In these years, for the first time, the employer-employee relationship made itself felt in the New Zealand coastal trade, and the first efforts were made to form a Seamen's Union. Unionism in the industry is therefore as old as the need for it.

£8 a month and a 12-hour day. It sounds backward enough today, but they weren't bad conditions for a seaman in the 1870s: but they had had to be fought for. They were actually won in January 1874, in a compromise settlement of a strike of the crews of ships sailing out of the port of Wellington which had started in October of the previous year. The men were seeking a bigger wage-packet than that, and shorter hours — but even the compromise agreement was an improvement on the conditions prevailing before the strike.

Before 1874, the men who sailed the ships so vital to the growing economy had to accept the wages and conditions the shipowners cared to hand out to them. Sometimes, when trade was booming and there were more job opportunities than workers offering to take them, the competition between employ-

ers to attract enough workers to enable their businesses to enjoy the best of the boom was enough to force wages up to reasonable levels, and to compel some improvement in working conditions. But the roulette-wheel of uninhibited capitalism often whirled crazily towards depression. Boom-and-bust was the accepted pattern of economic life. And depression times brought an automatic reversal of the gains of prosperity. Wages slumped back to the breadline, and the harshness of life on deck and in the focsle was felt with all its force.

To gain as much as £8 a month and a 12-hour day in 1874, and to lead them through the disciplined action of withdrawing their services from the labour market until the employers were prepared to talk about it, the Wellington seamen had formed a New Zealand Seamen's Union — the first real effort to organize New Zealand's seamen on an industrial basis. There had been a Seamen's Mutual Benefit and Protection Society formed at a meeting in Auckland in November 1872, but by early in 1873 it had decided to avoid all questions involving relations with employers, and restricted its activities to sickness and retirement benefits, changing the word "Protection" in its name to "Improvement".

Wellington's example was quickly followed by Lyttelton, where a union was established in February 1874 and soon succeeded in obtaining the same conditions. But within a few years depression had driven many of the activists to seek jobs ashore: both the Wellington and Lyttelton unions had ceased to operate, and the seamen were left defenseless in the face of a worsening economic situation. The postwar boom had definitely burst by 1877, and employees, lacking a strong organisation determined to defend their interests, were an easy prey for avaricious employers anxious to preserve their profit margins by cutting costs.

In March 1879, the Lyttelton union had been briefly revived, but the following year a visitor from Australia could find no signs of activity.

This visitor was a man called George Sangster, an executive member of the Federated Seamen's Union of Australia which had been formed a few years before, and president of its Victorian Branch. New Zealand and Australian ships plied extensively in one another's waters in those days, and the unionists on Australian ships felt an understandable concern at the situation on this side of the Tasman. Quite apart from the threat to their own conditions which would be involved in any

deterioration in the conditions of New Zealand seamen, they felt a brotherly responsibility to help to organise their fellow-workers in the same industry in the smaller and less populous colony next door.

So Sangster was sent over by the Council of the Australian union late in 1879. His task was to help to form unions in ports where there were none, and, with any existing unions, to help them amalgamate into a permanent national organisation with branch status in the Australian body. He came across on one-way articles, signed off in Lyttelton early in 1880, and started work at once.

The union which had been re-formed in that port less than a year before had ceased to meet, although there were men keen to see it revived. Shortage of work, however, had driven them to other ports or up country to get what they could of the diminishing supply of jobs available. Sangster sized up the situation fairly quickly, and after a brief tour of all ports decided that the most promising centres for organisation were the three largest ports of Dunedin, Wellington, and Auckland, none of which had so far been hit so hard by the slump as Lyttelton. In each centre he talked to the men who had been active in earlier attempts to form a union, younger men who were aware of the need for unions and willing to play their part, and older men from England who could contribute a wealth of experience gained in the Chartist movement and the earliest trade unions.

Sangster called successive meetings in the three ports, starting with Dunedin and moving north. His message was simple. The Australian seamen, having beaten competition from "cheap labour" (Chinese-manned) ships on their own coast, had an interest in ensuring that their New Zealand brothers won the same protection — and he was sure the local seamen wanted it for themselves. . . . By the time he returned to Australia a few months later he had left behind him a Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand which looked vigorous enough to survive.

And it did survive. Despite calamitous industrial defeats and internal disruptions, the Seamen's Union has had a continuous and active existence from 1880 until the present time.

In those days, Dunedin was the largest city in New Zealand, and the Port Chalmers-Dunedin complex saw more shipping than any other seaport on our coast. It was the obvious place for a national seamen's union to have its headquarters, just as

it was the obvious place for the biggest employer in the industry, the Union Steam Ship Co., to have its Head Office. Into the bargain, the larger populations of bigger cities tended to produce more people of the active and thoughtful kind who were prepared to act as union officials. The Dunedin branch became "Head Office Branch", its officials serving double duty as national officials as well, and the Auckland and Wellington branches became respectively the "A" Branch and the "B" Branch.

It was an uphill battle for unionism in those days: not just to gain concessions from employers, but for unions to exist at all. The very idea of unions of employees formed to bargain collectively with employers for a fair deal had only just been legally accepted. There was no "democracy" then in the sense in which we accept the word now. The vote was not the equal right of every New Zealander at the age of 21, as it is today. Only male property-owners could vote, and if anyone owned property in more than one electorate then he had more than one vote. Parliament naturally reflected the opinions of property-owners, and the Governments of New Zealand from the time our Parliament was first given responsible power (1856) until the passing of an Act giving "One Man, One Vote" (1889), were predominantly "conservative", and represented the interests of wealthy squatters in the countryside and wealthy merchants and manufacturers in the towns. Understandably, most of these people wanted no truck with organisations devoted to the welfare of mere wage-workers.

Surprisingly, however, there were some genuine liberals among the New Zealand politicians of those times — successful pioneers, many of them, who had not forgotten the starry hopes of a better society with which they had left the old country. Already it was an article of the "Liberal" creed in Britain that trade unions should at least have legal recognition. The reasons for this attitude were not uniformly enlightened.

Back in 1833 (the year before the deportation of England's trade union trail-blazers, the Tolpuddle Martyrs), a "Liberal" London newspaper proprietor declared that the worst consequence of the old law making trade unions illegal was that

"The unionists, having the mark of criminals set upon them, and exasperated by what they felt to be oppression, were only made more determined and reckless in their conduct by the law which continually pursued them, without being able to hunt them down. . . .

“It did not, in point of fact, prevent the thing which it prohibited. Trades unions were formed and maintained in spite of the law. It had only the power to impress a dark and skulking character upon the proceedings of these combinations, not to break them up.”

To avoid the dreadful prospect of Unions acquiring this “dark and skulking character”, and prevent the workers from such “determined and reckless” courses, the “liberal” New Zealand businessmen of the 1870s and 1880s merely showed a far-sighted recognition of their own interests in seeking legal recognition for trade unions. This was the effect of the Trade Union Act which was introduced in the House of Representatives in Wellington in 1878 by Sir George Grey, twice Governor of the Colony in its early years and at this time its Premier. It was passed, and became law, giving New Zealand workers for the first time a legal framework within which their organisations could operate, with legal protection in return for the cost of registration.

Another aspect of modern democracy which we take very much for granted was equally brand-new in New Zealand at that time — and that was, universal education. The Education Act, establishing our system of State primary schools — “free, compulsory, and secular” — was passed only in 1877, one year ahead of the Trade Union Act. Nowadays we assume without question that every rank-and-file member of an organisation will be capable of taking minutes or reading an agenda or conducting correspondence, but the unionists of 1880 could assume nothing of the kind. There would be members who had gone to a charity school, or been taught the elements of reading and writing by an earnest parent who had taught himself — but the average working man was scarcely literate. The number of members of a trade union who could competently fulfil the duties of an official, of a president or a secretary, was fairly small.

These two factors — the newness of trade union legality and the low level of literacy — had their impact on the organisations which were formed in those years. The courage that was still needed to be known as a trade union spokesman, and the rarity of even the most elementary learning among the workers meant that the establishment of a strong union often needed the selfless assistance of “outsiders”, of educated men in business or the professions, with genuinely liberal views, who were prepared to “stand up and be counted” by accepting

official positions in an organisation formed to defend the rights of the workers and undertaking the essential chores of presidency and secretaryship. Being beyond the reach of immediate victimisation by the employers, these people often performed an incalculable service in holding a union together, representing its members in cross-table negotiations with the boss, and keeping alive the spirit of unionism among a membership in which it might otherwise have faded in a welter of faint hearts and cold feet.

This was not necessarily the case with the seamen of New Zealand in the 1880s. There were many remarkable men among those early ships' crews, and the earliest union organisations made no distinction between officers and men: captains and engineers were free to join along with the deck boys and stokers, and many of them did so. But even among the most menial of the men below deck there were those with sufficient know-how and strength of character to fill a union post with competence. Nevertheless, many of the New Zealand Seamen's Union's earliest functionaries were men whose actual connection with the industry was remote, though their trade union sentiments were real enough.

For example, the man who took the chair at the first meeting called by Sangster in Dunedin in 1880 was George Fawcitt Dodds, a Port Chalmers chemist, and he accepted election as the first President of the Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand. The secretary elected at the same time was a publican of the same town, Thomas Dodson, who had been a sailor many years before, but whose closest association with sailors by this time was in transactions across the bar of his pub. (In the same way, during the 1890s, the presidency of the Union's "B" Branch in Wellington was occupied by the lawyer, Alfred Hindmarsh, who was later to become an independent Labour M.P., and Harry Holland's predecessor as first Leader of the Labour Party in Parliament.)

The initial objects of the Union were at once bold and cautious, reflecting both the determination of the members and the difficulties with which they were beset:

"To counteract influences that may be working against its members' interests;

"To initiate reforms;

"To sweep away abuses;

"To enable members to fill their positions with comfort to themselves and advantage to their employers;

“To watch over and guard the interests of its members wherever they may be assailed;

“And while doing this, members must bear in mind that the Federated Seamen’s Union is not formed to work in antagonism to their employers; on the contrary, they are required to show by their ability and strict attention to their duties, that the fact of their being members of the Society is a guarantee to owners of ships and shipping companies that in employing them they are consulting their common interests.”

Entrance fee to the Union was set at £2, and the subscription at the rate of 2s. a month.

The conditions won in Wellington and Lyttelton in 1874 had been lost in the subsequent depression, when the labour market was emphatically a buyers’ market, and there was a desperate throng of demoralised, jobless men prepared to accept employment on almost any terms short of starvation. Wages laid down in the 1880s were a basic £7 a month, with an extra £1 for a bosun and for an AB employed as lamptrimmer; an extra £2 for firemen and greasers; and an extra £3 for a donkeyman. Working cargo in ports or roadsteads was limited to 8 hours between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., with 2 hours off for meals, and sea watches in the stokehold on days of sailing and arriving at port were limited to 8 hours. All work by deckhands at sea between 5 p.m. and 6 a.m. which was not necessary for the navigation or safety of the ship was paid at overtime rates (1s. 6d. an hour), and these rates applied also to cleaning, scouring, or painting by firemen or trimmers between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. when the ship was in port.

Members were expected to participate in the activities and decisions of the union. All members resident in port and not currently employed on a ship had to attend every monthly branch meeting or pay a fine of 2s. 6d.; and every ship in port had to be represented by at least one delegate if the crew had less than 8 members, and 2 if it had 8 or more — on pain of a similar penalty being extracted from every member on the ship.

Each branch had a committee of management consisting of a president, two vice presidents, a secretary and treasurer (usually combined), a quartermaster (to help maintain order at meetings, inspect credentials at the door, and oversee the custody of the books), and four committeemen. No management committee decision, however, was binding on members, except in

emergency conditions, until it was adopted by a general meeting of the members.

Throughout the 1880s, the three branches of the F.S.U. continued to flourish, despite continued depression and unemployment. By mid-1886 (the earliest date from which we have any minutes or correspondence), "B" branch in Wellington was receiving over £50 a month in dues and entrance fees, and a "fair proportion" of the members were finding jobs on ships, though the Union appears to have been enforcing a rotation system at times when unemployment was particularly acute. Some assistance towards the solution of unemployment, at least among the more adventurous seamen, was being provided at that time by a gold rush to South Africa. One ship calling for crew to sign on only as far as the Cape was filled, under Union direction, with single seamen who had been unemployed for a long period. But the Union was still facing enormous problems.

Wages and conditions for Australian seamen at that time were negotiated periodically with an Australian Steam Ship Owners' Association (the A.S.S.O.A.) by the Australian F.S.U., to which the F.S.U. of New Zealand was affiliated with branch status. The A.S.S.O.A.'s letter agreeing to observe the union's agreed conditions was hopefully printed by the New Zealand union as an appendix to its rules — but in fact, most New Zealand shipowners remained unconnected with the Australian owners' organisation, and they had no equivalent organisation of their own. The wages and conditions of some New Zealand seamen on the trans-Tasman run were protected by the Australian agreement, but the New Zealand union had a hard job negotiating the same conditions with individual shipowners to cover the New Zealand coastal trade.

The first agreement successfully negotiated by the New Zealand Seamen's Union and conforming to the terms of the Australian agreement, was with the Union Steam Ship Company in 1884. It involved, among other things, a £1 rise on the earlier agreement for firemen on 6-hour watches. The Union Company, the biggest single employer of New Zealand seamen, had been founded only ten years earlier in Dunedin with less than half a dozen ships, but it had greatly expanded during the boom years of the late 1870s. By the mid-80s, it was not only the major shipping concern on the New Zealand coast, but also a large-scale operator between New Zealand and Australia, Asia, America, and Britain.

Once an agreement had been sewn up with this firm, the union normally had little difficulty with the smaller employers. A short, sharp strike had been necessary against Auckland's Northern Steam Ship Co. to force it into line in 1884, but the rest followed quietly enough.

Then, in 1886, the Australian Steam Ship Owners' Association made a bold bid (on the excuse of a "recession" in trade) to force a wage-cut. There was considerable concern among New Zealand seamen, whose current agreement was the same as the one their Australian comrades were working under, that the Union Company might follow suit. Bob Seymour, the "B" branch secretary in Wellington, thought this was unlikely "as they have declared a dividend of 8% and 2s. per share bonus, which is very good news as such results as these tend to keep wages up". But the feeling throughout the union was that it was the appropriate moment for a show of solidarity with the Australian union, to try and stop the rot at its source.

The Australian F.S.U. called a special conference in Sydney late in 1886, to which the New Zealand union sent both Dodds and Dodson (the Head Office president and secretary) as delegates. Confronted by a united threat of direct action, and unwilling to buy a fight at that time, the A.S.S.O.A. backed down. There was no wage-cut in Australia, and the Union Company announced that it had no such intention either. . . . But if the union's delegates returned to New Zealand in a mood of complacency, they counted without the recalcitrant Northern S.S. Co. in Auckland. This company had been forced into line with the current agreement only by strike action, and it figured that the time was as good for a wage-cut as any other. . . .

3.

BOSSSES AREN'T NECESSARY: 1887-88

In mid-1887, the Northern Steam Ship Co. started to renege on the 1884 agreement by paying £1 a month less than the agreed £10 for firemen on 6-hour watches, and 6d an hour less than the agreed 1s. 6d. for overtime to crew members working cargoes in ports and roadsteads. On top of this, the Company insisted that the agreed overtime maximum had to be exceeded on its operations because of the special circumstances prevailing in Northland tidal creeks and harbours.

The Northern Co., owned and controlled by the MacGregor family, was at that time the largest firm shipping out of Auckland, and it had a monopoly of the Auckland coastal trade. Built up on the basis of successive takeovers of smaller operators and forcing others out of business, it had become by far the biggest employer of Auckland seamen — and the Auckland branch of the F.S.U. was known to be the weakest, both in numbers and militancy, of any of the union's branches. The company was confident of an easy victory, and other companies were watching to see if they could get away with a similar wage-cut.

At first, the company's expectations seemed likely to come true. Not only did the Auckland branch of the union find itself too weak to carry its members in a ban on sailing in Northern Co. ships, but the Australian Ship Owners' Association chose the moment to renege on the undertaking given at the time of the Australian Union's council meeting in Sydney the year before, and announced that they were reducing wages to the precise scale being paid by the Northern Co. in Auckland! The Company's stand took on the appearance of being part of an international conspiracy against the wages of seafarers. . .

The Wellington and Dunedin branches were naturally alarmed that a surrender in Auckland could lead to a general wage-cut throughout the country. Seymour, the Wellington secretary, did his best to stiffen the Auckland branch's resistance. The men in Wellington, he wrote, "considered 1s. 6d. an hour is small enough, especially for surfing work where long hours are the order (when the beach is workable), and if a freight of

wool is got off the overtime is small consideration. In several cases boats have left here Saturday night, arrived at station at daybreak Sunday, and work all day up to waist in water and return to port Monday morning with full freight. . . 1s. 6d. per hour is well earned. . . ”

To make matters worse, the Northern Co. started running its boats (with their underpaid crews) as far south as Wellington and Wellington unionists became even more anxious about the possibility of local employers being influenced by example. The first Northern Co. ship to tie up at a Wellington wharf was visited on arrival by Seymour with a deputation of local Union members, intent on persuading the crew to leave the ship and stick out for Union conditions.

“They were thoroughly ashamed of themselves,” he wrote afterwards, reporting the incident to Head Office. *“No one could we see on deck, and in the evening they were stuck in the focsle with no light. . . Some of our members are desirous of making their acquaintance.”*

A timely change in the office-holders of the Union at Dunedin was undoubtedly responsible for what the Union finally did to counter the Northern Co.’s bid to pioneer a general wage-cut. Until 1887, the officials of each branch, including the Head Office branch, had been elected by the local members only. Wellington members had from an early stage agitated for a greater say by the northern branches in the national policy of the Union, and early in 1887 all three branches agreed that the next election for head office president and general secretary should be conducted on a national basis, and the rules amended to make this change permanent.

Dodson, the publican who had been secretary of both the Dunedin-Port Chalmers branch and of the national organisation since its inception, announced that he was not seeking re-election. The problems of negotiation and travel on behalf of the Union had taken up an increasing amount of his time, and he felt strongly that there was enough talent still active inside the industry to supply a replacement of at least equal calibre. There is no reason to suppose that Dodson resigned office with any ill-will, despite the fact that his resignation was preceded by a considerable growth in the criticisms of Head Office policy and activities by the other branches and within the Dunedin Branch itself. Indeed, Dodson himself recommended that the Head Office secretaryship be turned into a General Secretaryship, and filled by a full-time functionary, preferably by “a

suitable candidate from among the rank and file of the membership". He believed that such a move was justified by the amount of work, and the flourishing state of the Union, both in finance and in the level of activity among members.

There was some resentment in the south, especially among the remainder of the Head Office executive, that a new functionary could be elected to conduct the affairs of their branch by members of other branches, but little notice was taken of it. There were only two nominations for the position of General Secretary — a little known Dunedin member, and a very well known ship's master then living in Wanganui, Mr John Andrew Millar. Millar was jointly nominated from Auckland and Wellington, and he also enjoyed much support in Dunedin, where he had lived for some years.

Millar was, perhaps, an unusual type of man to seek office in an industrial union. Son of a Scottish Major-General in the Indian Army, he had been sent home to Scotland for a grammar school education, and then came out to New Zealand in 1870, as a boy of 15, to settle on the land as a sheep farmer. Like so many of our pioneers, Millar saw New Zealand as a potential "brave new world", where a better society could be built on the basis of racial equality and social justice, free from the grinding poverty and white supremacy he had known in India, and from the sordid insecurity he had seen in Scotland's crofts and city slums.

Millar's pioneering intentions bore witness to his adventurous spirit. Young and impressionable, he had been sparked by the long voyage to New Zealand under sail with a new enthusiasm — the sea. He spent much more time among the officers and crew of the clipper than he did with his fellow passengers — and shortly after arriving at Dunedin, he had thrown up his farming plans and commenced training as a ship's officer in the service of Patrick Hamilton and Co., working at first on sailing ships, and gaining his Master's ticket for steamers in 1881.

As an officer with Shaw Savill from then till 1887, Millar took an increasing interest in the infant Seamen's Union, of which (like many ship's officers of that time) he became a subscribing member. Well educated by comparison with the average sailor, and with those qualities of personal leadership and authority which men acquire with a few years' experience as a ship's captain, his voice was listened to with respect at union meetings, and his advice frequently sought on a question of tactics in wage negotiations or the drafting of a difficult

letter. As a sea captain, he was later described by a fellow-unionist who had served under him as "one of the nicest and most affable officers that ever gave an order".

Millar's zeal for the sea-going life had become more and more modified by his concern at the hardships inflicted by the shipowners on their employees, hardships which often seemed to him not only unnecessary but motivated solely by a greed for profits. Conspicuously outspoken on Union matters, Millar found himself the target of employers' suspicions, and was persuaded without much difficulty to stand for the office of General Secretary of the Union in 1887. He was elected by a resounding majority over his single (and much more "moderate") opponent.

Millar's election to the chief executive post of the Seamen's Union marked the beginning of what became known as "the new unionism" in New Zealand. The term had come across from Britain, and it involved a broader concept of the role of trade unions than was current among the "old unionists", who held that a Union's activities should be restricted to the protection of craft skills, benefit society activities, and collective bargaining with employers. The "new unionism" embraced these obligations as well, but it undertook them in the perspective of advancing the economic and political interests of the working class as a whole, concentrated on the organisation of workers on an industrial (rather than a craft) basis, and raised the political goal of the abolition of the economic system under which the producers of wealth were the wage-slaves of the owners of wealth.

These "new" attitudes were more or less alarming to the "old" unionists, and it wasn't long before Millar found himself at loggerheads with the old executive of the Union. Dodds, the president, was so incensed by one very minor difference with Millar that he made his own continuance in office dependent upon Millar's immediate replacement, and the rest of the executive took Dodds's side. The Head Office branch, however, declared their confidence in Millar, so recently elected to office by a convincing majority, and the other branches took the same stand. Dodds and the rest of the executive resigned in a body, and were immediately replaced by Head Office with a full slate of members supporting the proposed "new" line, who were unanimously confirmed in office by the Auckland and Wellington branches. The new president was Ben Bern, another ship's master still in active service. Also British-born, Bern was

a hardy old sea-dog whose external appearance and habits were much closer to those of the majority of the members he represented than were those of the gentler, more polished Millar: but their qualities were complementary, and they formed an excellent partnership in leading a Union about to embark on struggles which called for both shrewd planning and fiery militancy.

Shortly after taking office, Millar went to Auckland for an on-the-spot investigation of the trouble with the Northern Co. The prospects of successfully resuming strike action were distinctly dimmed by the local Branch's decision to "face the facts" and allow members to sign on under the Company's conditions as the only alternative to starvation. He listened to various suggestions from the members as to alternative methods of fighting the Company.

After a brief look over the situation, and a consultation with the Branch in general meeting, Millar made his brilliant proposal for forcing the Company to the wall without injuring the employment prospects of the local members — the chartering of ships by the Union itself to undercut the Company's freights on its own runs, while employing members at Union rates! The Branch endorsed the suggestion, the support of Dunedin and Wellington was secured by telegraph, and the Union ordered its members off all Northern Co. ships. To their credit, the response of the men this time was overwhelming. Only 5 men refused the call — and were immediately expelled as scabs.

Response in other Branches was also enthusiastic. In Wellington, the men were reported as considering "the idea of running boats a good one if properly managed. . . . It should learn MacGregor a lesson. . . . Our members are agreeable to back you up."

Millar's tactics for gaining public support were ingenious. He formed a company in which all shares were owned by the Union, and called it the "Jubilee Steam Ship Co." in honour of Queen Victoria, who was celebrating the Golden Jubilee of her reign that year. The house flag designed for the company consisted of a St. Andrew's cross (a white diagonal cross on a navy blue ground), symbolising the Scottish origins of Dunedin where the Union's head office was, as well as poking a gently satirical finger at the Scottish origins of the MacGregor family; a gold crown, symbolising the Jubilee, in the centre of the uppermost blue segment; and a red lozenge, symbolising the brotherhood of unionism as well as completing the red-

white-and-blue combination suitable to the Royal occasion, covering the intersection of the arms of the cross. Across the red lozenge was the inscription "JUBILEE CO." in letters of gold.

The head office of the Union authorised Millar and Bern to take any action necessary, and specifically stated that "it would be cheaper for the Union to charter and operate steamers to find employment for their members than to pay them strike pay." They also authorised Millar to maintain a steady campaign of publicity in order to keep the public, including the merchants and farmers who patronised the Northern Co., in sympathy with what the Union was doing.

The press, however, while giving some space to the Union's case, stood loyally on the side of the embattled employers, the Northern Co. The *New Zealand Herald* expressed grave doubts "whether the Seamen's Union would find any steamship owners willing to permit their boats being used by the Union as a means to crush a company who are endeavouring by necessary retrenchment to hold together trades that are of very great benefit to the mercantile community."

But there was a depression in trade, and other shipowners proved less sentimental in their attachment to the Northern Co.'s endeavours than in their desire to see idle ships netting a profit. Thus Millar met with little difficulty in chartering, on behalf of the Jubilee Co., a small packet-boat called S.S. *Stormbird* from Wellington Steam Packet Co., which had used her mainly for transporting commuters across Wellington Harbour, as well as for picnic excursions in summertime. Shortly afterwards, the Jubilee Co. also chartered a larger vessel, the S.S. *Bellinger* from Newcastle in Australia. The charters were formally executed by Millar and Bern as the Jubilee Co.'s "directors", crews were engaged exclusively from among Union members at Union rates, with preference to those withdrawn from Northern Co. boats, and the two ships were put into operation on runs then exclusively served by the Northern Co., but offering to carry freight and passengers at distinctly competitive rates. The *Stormbird*, mastered by Bern himself, ran between Auckland and Whangarei and other northern ports, while the *Bellinger* at first challenged the Northern Co. on the Onehunga-Taranaki trade, but was later converted to carry cattle across the Tasman, a lucrative service which the Northern Co. was then pioneering. A third vessel, the S.S. *Planet*, was then chartered to take over the Taranaki run.

Despite the disapproval of the daily newspapers, the Jubilee Co. became rapidly popular among the coastal travellers and shippers of freight. Not only were their charges significantly lower than the Northern Co.'s, but the united and cheerful spirit of their crews helped to make them most obliging and friendly people to travel and do business with. Many a Northland farmer who brought his produce down to the Stormbird, and many a New Plymouth businessman taking a passage northwards on the Planet, would tell the crew: *"I don't know whether I would have donated anything to a strike fund — but I'm only too pleased to help you fight the Northern Co. this way!"*

For twelve months the sailing notices of the Jubilee Co. appeared in the Auckland papers. It was a long and bitter battle, for though the Union's Auckland members were kept employed at union rates, they keenly resented the youths "straight from the plough tail or the cow yard" who had taken over their jobs at scab rates on the Northern Co.'s vessels.

There was no Shipping and Seamen Act in those days, and ships could legally be manned with men who had neither skill nor experience. Many of them spent much of their time groaning in the scuppers with mal-de-mer, and were only too keen to jump ship at the first port. Others were easily persuaded to seek employment elsewhere after a confrontation with Union men in a waterside pub. In these encounters, the unionists were under strict instructions to use the persuasive force of argument and the proof of their bigger pay-packets rather than "more summary methods" — but the police courts heard the echoes of several scuffles.

The Northern Co. soon found itself losing money hand over fist. The few ships they managed to keep on the run were constantly losing their crews, but the MacGregors were determined to show that their Scottish persistence was as strong as Millar's. They kept up the fight until it hurt so badly that the company faced the prospect of going into liquidation. At this point, realism overcame obstinacy. In October 1888, peace feelers were put out to the Union through the newly formed New Zealand Ship Owners' Association, which shared the offices of the Union Steam Ship Co. in Dunedin. The U.S.S.Co.'s Managing Director, James Mills, was empowered to negotiate a settlement on the Northern Co.'s behalf, but when it was apparent that his authority didn't extend to a complete surrender to the

Union's terms, the Union sent Millar to Auckland to continue negotiations directly with the MacGregors.

Negotiations in Auckland lasted a week, and the terms of settlement were finally announced on 12th November. The press tried to make it look as if the Northern Co. had at least won something, but it was hard to credit them much on the basis of the facts. The Jubilee Co. was to withdraw its ships and cease operations, and all its outstanding obligations were to be taken over by the Northern Co., which was to employ only Union men at Union rates. It was a heartening victory for the Union, and was received with cheers at meetings of all Union branches. The Co.'s point about requiring crews to work cargoes outside Union overtime hours on tidal creeks was conceded, as long as full overtime rates were paid.

The Northern Co. was given until the end of November to discharge all non-Union men, though the Union undertook to accept applications for membership from all experienced sailors employed by the Company except for the five scabs who had already been expelled for refusing to withdraw from the Northern Co.'s ships at the beginning of the dispute. The *New Zealand Herald* expressed the indignation of the employing class by greeting the agreement with editorial dismay that the Company should have "agreed to discharge from their boats all the hands that stood by them manfully in the struggle, and to take the men who have fought against them!" (Even in this acrimonious outburst, the journalist was unable to deny the humanity of the Unionists, while the scabs were contemptuously reduced to "hands"!)

The Union had won — but it was an expensive victory. Four month's charter for the *Bellinger* alone had cost £878, with a wages bill of £712 on top of that, and £82 10s for coal, and £240 for provisions. The competitive freight rates and passenger fares had brought in returns much lower than the sum of these outgoings, and the Union had to subsidise the operations of the Jubilee Co. by quite large amounts. But with the flourishing state of the branches, and some small assistance from other unions, the Union had been easily able to meet this obligation out of a special levy to which members of the Australian Seamen's Union also subscribed for a time, and the members paid out all the more readily as they realised how much more it would have cost them to have kept their Auckland comrades on strike pay, with much less chance of success.

The newspapers estimated that the total cost of the Union's

victory was £4,000, but Millar later declared that he wasn't ashamed to admit that it was in fact a much greater sum. *"Our object was to make the Northern Co. lose — and the Union lost £14,000 to the Company's £22,000. On those terms, we would be willing to lose another £14,000!"*

And the victory was not only an immediate question of preserving the wages and conditions of seamen: it was a timely demonstration of the strength which the working class could muster if it was organised, and the example gave new hope to workers throughout the country. The Union had not merely shown that it was possible to force an avaricious employer to his knees: it had proved also that organised employees could operate an industry quite satisfactorily without any employers at all!

The realisation that "bosses aren't necessary" did more than anything else to encourage the workers of New Zealand in the tremendous strides they took in organising themselves in the years following 1888.

4.

THE MARITIME COUNCIL AND THE FIRST GREAT STRIKE: 1889-90

The victory over the Northern Co. and the new spirit which it had helped to engender among the New Zealand working class can be seen as part of a world movement in the late 1880s. Labour was on the march in every country with a developed or developing industrial potential. The Knights of Labour had been inspiring an upsurge of new interest in trade unionism in the United States, with a wave of strikes crossing that country in 1886 and 1887. In Britain, the matchgirls had conducted a successful strike in 1888, and the dockers were organising for their great showdown with the shipowners the following year. From Australia, news came of the formation of a Maritime Labour Council in Melbourne, devoted to strengthening the efforts of individual unions by mutual co-operation and financial support.

This last example of working class solidarity appealed strongly to the N.Z. Seamen's Union, especially in the light of the feeble amount of support forthcoming in its current dispute from other New Zealand unionists. As early as October 1887, Edward Ellison, secretary of the Auckland branch of the Union (and also secretary of the local branch of the Cooks and Stewards Union) had written to the head office of the Cooks and Stewards in Port Chalmers, complaining of the weakness of their members in "failing to back up the seamen in their struggle with the Northern". The secretary of the Cooks and Stewards' Head Office Branch (another Port Chalmers publication, one W. J. Waters) replied: "It is a matter of regret . . . but under the circumstances we were powerless . . . The few members of our society employed by the Northern Co. would have been easily replaced. However, it is to be hoped that before long there will be one vast Federation of all the Trade Union societies of Australasia, when any such attempt as this will be crushed at once."

If the Seamen's Union's victory over the Northern inspired other workers with the desirability of organising themselves, the

shortcomings of the struggle made the Union itself see clearly the need for improved organization, for streamlining the machinery of its own internal democracy, and for extending contacts among other groups of workers and helping them to organize for their mutual benefit.

Early in the brief history of the Jubilee Company, the Wellington Branch of the Union had good reason to complain of the failure of Head Office to keep the members informed of day-to-day developments in the struggle. An undertaking by Millar to issue a fortnightly bulletin to all members had not been kept, and for long periods the members received no account of how their "Jubilee Company levy" was being expended. Nevertheless, as Seymour wrote cheerfully to Ellison early in 1888, "whatever happens, we intend to support the struggle against the Northern Co. to the bitter end."

That year, the Union found its affiliation to the Australian Union of tremendous assistance. Persistent criticisms by the Wellington Branch of the lack of information from Head Office were deftly countered by the Head Office appointing Bob Seymour as the New Zealand delegate to a Council meeting of the Australian union called to meet in Brisbane in March. Among other things, Seymour was instructed to obtain the Australian union's assistance in chartering another vessel, and he returned with the *Bellinger*, initial finance for which was met by a levy on members of the Australian union. Millar went over to Australia for a further council meeting in July, and came back with both further financial assistance and valuable fraternal advice on the conduct of the dispute.

Support from other unionists in New Zealand, however, was much less impressive. Over the whole year that the struggle lasted, only £80 was subscribed by New Zealand unions apart from the Seamen's Union itself, as compared with £14,000 by the Seamen's organisations in Australia and New Zealand. And most of that £80 came towards the end of the battle from the miners' unions of the West Coast.

Following the triumph of November 1888, the Council of the Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand met in Dunedin and held a very frank and self-critical discussion on the failure of communication between Head Office and branches during the struggle and the lack of support from other unions. An improved system of regular weekly correspondence was resolved upon, and a more frequent convening of the national Council to enable all Union business to be more fully aired and dis-

cussed. The possibility of a printed journal for the members was also considered, but it was decided that this should be discussed with other unions so that the cost could be spread, and so that the working class as a whole could have a news medium independent of the employing class. Co-operation in such a venture was seen as a valuable aid to bringing New Zealand's scattered trade unions together in a joint body along the lines of the Australian Maritime Council.

As Seymour put it in a letter to Ellison just before the conference: "We had better marshal our forces ready for another battle, as everywhere we see and hear of capital organising, so it behoves us to be on the alert." Seymour, however, was to be replaced as secretary in Wellington early in 1889 by Charles McCaull, following a bitter disagreement between Seymour and Millar concerning the actual winding-up of the Jubilee Co. McCaull, who supported Millar, convinced the Wellington branch members that regardless of the rights and wrongs of the internal dispute, unity on a national basis was just as crucial in victory as at any other time. In a ballot conducted by Head Office in pursuance of the new rules agreed between the branches shortly before the Northern Co. dispute began, Mr Caull defeated Seymour by 3 to 1 in a total poll of over 400 — but Seymour was declared elected unopposed in a vote taken under the "old" rules at a meeting of shore members of the Wellington branch, and he tried to hold onto office for some weeks. He barricaded himself in the new Union room fronting the waterfront which he had been responsible for acquiring for the Union at £5 a month — but other Wellington unions had use of the room and helped to pay a substantial proportion of the rent, and they were appalled at the prospect of a serious split in the ranks of the strongest union in the country. Pressure from these other unions finally helped persuade Seymour to face the facts and give way to his elected successor.

This was to be only the first of a series of disruptions to occur in the Union in Wellington, but this one was dealt with so swiftly and skilfully by Millar that it was given no opportunity to develop into a schism. Seymour himself accepted the outcome without acrimony, and continued to hold office as one of the Branch's trustees. The Union was not able to overcome some of its subsequent experiences of disruption quite so easily, or in quite such a two-sided spirit of reconciliation.

Similar trouble in Auckland early in 1889 resulted in the

replacement of Ellison as branch secretary by John Duthie. It was becoming apparent that Millar and Bern were bringing a new broom to the Union. The "old Unionists" of the Seymour-Ellison type had been happy to nominate Millar for the secretaryship of the Union on the strength of his reputation, and they had gone along with his policies — but, schooled as they were in the ways of "old unionism", they had constantly raised objections to his militant tactics, had slowed up urgent business by a tendency to argue legalities, constantly raised quibbles in defence of branch "independence", and prevented the Union from acting with full effectiveness as a national body. Millar, in closer touch with the temper of the members at sea, had little difficulty in gaining support for the replacement of these men. Their period of useful service to the Union — undoubtedly great in its day — had simply come to an end.

It was obviously in the interests of the Seamen's Union to promote mutual solidarity with other unions in the maritime industry, and this solidarity increased rapidly during the early months of 1889 — much to the surprise of the "old unionists" accustomed to an organization concerned solely with matters affecting its own members.

One member of the Seamen's Union named Rees was working ashore at Cape Foulwind, and had accepted work on the waterfront at wages lower than those currently claimed by the Westport Labour Union (New Zealand's first waterfront union) whose members had been locked out by the Westport Harbour Board. He was astounded to receive a letter from his own Union, stating: *"If you persist in bidding defiance to the Westport Labour Union, you will be summarily dealt with by the Executive of the Seamen's Union, and your name will be posted throughout the whole Federation. As a member of the Seamen's Union, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for violating the principles of unionism in such a dastardly manner. Had you been a Unionist at heart, you would instantly have joined the ranks of the Westport L.U. and given them all the assistance in your power to defeat the unscrupulous purpose of the Contractors."*

The Rees Case, and the Westport wharf lockout out of which it arose, were the anvil on which a very firm solidarity was forged between the unions of seamen, watersiders, and miners in 1889. The President of the Denniston Miners' Association, John Lomas, had been instructed by his members to keep a close watch on the Westport wharf dispute, which was

regarded as the possible harbinger of a general wage-cut by all West Coast employers. The act of a seaman in scabbing on the watersiders at Cape Foulwind brought the Seamen's Union into direct contact with the West Coast miners, and commenced the fruitful personal association between Millar and Lomas.

The Westport dispute was finally settled with the assistance of the Seamen's Union, whose very considerable strength the Westport employers were extremely cautious of offending. The Cape Foulwind contractors were persuaded to back down and pay union rates, the Westport lockout was called off, and a warm bond of brotherhood was sealed between the three groups of workers involved.

Meanwhile, a wide variety of bread-and-butter issues were concerning the Seamen's Union's own members. The question of overtime rates for turning-to before 6 a.m. when a ship was in port was briefly disputed by the Union Co. on the basis of an ambiguity in the 1884 agreement, but the Co. eventually agreed that overtime was payable and that the point would be made explicit in the new agreement then under negotiation. Other companies, however, proved rather more difficult to persuade, and a number of brief stoppages, confined in each case to a single ship, were necessary to enforce compliance with the agreement.

An interesting "short-handed" case in 1889 involved the *Janet Nicoll*. She was due to sail from Timaru for Brisbane one night in February, and was found to be short of two firemen who had been arrested during a spree in the town. The crew refused to sail short-handed, but the delegate was warned by the captain that if the ship was held up more than 12 hours, the Union would be legally liable for "demurrage". Next morning, the two offending firemen were sentenced to a short prison term, and a rapid search for available Union members ashore brought no results. The delegate eventually agreed to sail with two non-Union replacements, on condition that they made immediate application to join the Union. This the two men agreed to do, but they signed on conditionally upon their being returned to Timaru.

On her return from Brisbane early in April, the *Janet Nicoll* called first at Lyttelton, where there was an unusually large number of unemployed members ashore. These members demanded that the two non-Union men be immediately replaced by unionists. The two original offenders had now been released

from Timaru jail, but could not be located. The Union was faced with the alternative of leaving the non-Unionists on board while Unionists were unemployed, and admitting them to the Union at the first opportunity; or replacing them by two Lyttelton men but having the Union billed for the two non-Unionists' passages back to Timaru. The Union ruled in favour of the former course, and was backed up by a large majority of Lyttelton members.

One of the respects in which the "new Unionism" differed from the "old" was in the emphasis given to "benefit society" activities. An arrangement had been in force since the early 1880s between each branch of the Seamen's Union and the local Hospital Board, by which the Union donated a fixed sum (normally about £25) a year to the Board, and the Board granted Hospital facilities at greatly reduced rates to Union members. The new policy of the Union favoured political agitation for free hospital service to be provided by the State, but continued the old policy while there was need for it. The old policy, however, had frequently been exploited by the employers, who succeeded in having the Union billed for hospital treatment given to Union members injured on the job. This practice was finally exposed and stopped following the widely discussed case of a member called Tom White, who lost an arm at work on a Union Co. vessel in mid-1889. The Co. tried to have his hospital expenses charged to the Union. The hospital authorities, forced to declare themselves when the case reached the point of being debated in the public press, came finally down on the Union's side. The Company was forced to pay, a precedent was publicly acknowledged, and the practice was discontinued.

The employment of Asian crews on New Zealand vessels at a fraction of Union rates also began to concern the Union at this period. In one case, the U.S.S.Co. ship *Bothwell Castle* arrived in New Zealand waters on her maiden voyage manned by underpaid Asians, and the Union insisted that the men should either be immediately discharged and returned to their home ports and replaced by Union members, or else paid Union rates for the current voyage and replaced at its termination by Union members whose passages had been paid to the port concerned. An offer by the Company to pay £200 directly to the Union as "part of the difference between the wages being paid and the wages payable under Union rules" was indignantly rejected by the Union as a "bribe."

From early in 1889, the Union's Head Office executive resumed serious efforts to form a New Zealand Maritime Council along the lines of the Australian body of the same name. Preliminary approaches had been made by the Seamen's Union to the Cooks and Stewards' Union to form such a body late in 1887, with the aim of strengthening the forces arrayed against the Northern Co. At that time, however, the cooks and stewards were half-hearted about the proposal. Unions of watersiders proved too fragile to enter any permanent alliance, and the Seamen's Union itself became so occupied with its own struggle that the matter was dropped.

From early in 1889, however, the Union was encouraged by its successful alliance with the miners and the watersiders on the West Coast to take up the idea once more. Using its own prestige and personnel, the Union helped to form or re-form Wharf Labourers' Unions at Dunedin, Wellington, and other ports, and then to weld them into a national federation. The next step was to call a conference of interested bodies to form a national Maritime Council, and this conference was held in Dunedin from 26th to 28th October 1889. Besides the F.S.U., the watersiders' unions of Auckland, Wellington, Lyttelton, Dunedin, Greymouth and Westport were represented, and the coalminers' unions of Denniston and Brunnerton.

Overseas cables printed in the local newspapers had given new heart to unionism in New Zealand by their reports of the great London Dock Strike in August and September, and its outstanding success. The Seamen's Union had been instrumental in collecting money among its own members and other New Zealand unionists to help the London dockers — and though the separate figure is unobtainable for the amount raised in New Zealand alone, the total amount raised in Australia and New Zealand together (£30,423 15s) was almost three-quarters of the whole fund received by the London dockers from all sources! Some of the ideas of the London dockers' leaders (Jonh Burns, Tom Mann, and Ben Tillett) became current among New Zealand unionists, together with the famous song composed by the docker-poet Jim Connell for one of the big strike rallies in London: "The People's Flag is deepest red".

The announcement of the formation of the Maritime Council, with 8,000 affiliated members, on 28 October 1889, was an historic occasion, and its importance was fully realised by the press, the politicians, the employers, and the workers themselves. Beginning in the early 1880s, there had been Trades

and Labour Councils formed in all four main centres, with representatives from most existing unions. But the outlook and alignment of these Councils was severely limited by the "craft" nature of most of their constituent bodies, and the couple of national conferences which they held in the 1880s led neither to the formation of any permanent national organisation nor to the intimation of any effective or coherent labour policies. The Maritime Council, by contrast, aimed to be a national body uniting the strength of the workers in the transport and coal-mining industries, "which, by an aggregation of power, can enforce the carrying out of legitimate reforms, where a single union might find the task beyond its individual strength."

Millar was elected to the important position of Secretary of the Council. The President was D. P. Fisher, (President of the Wellington Wharf Labourers' Union), and the Treasurer was John Lomas.

Once formed, the Council grew rapidly, and inspired a tremendous crop of new unions where none had existed before. Lomas and Millar went on tour and organized a union in every mining area in New Zealand. Following sensational exposures of "sweating" in the clothing industry, Millar helped to form a Tailoresses' Union.

Applications to join the Maritime Council came flooding in from unions old and new. These included Federated Wharf Carters, Expressmen's and Storemen's Union; Mercantile Marine Officers' Association; and the Cooks' and Stewards' Union. The Marine Officers' organization, newly formed in 1889, arose out of a recognition that ships' officers had interests distinct from those of ships' crews, and followed close on the heels of the formation of a similar organisation in Australia. In response to it, the Seamen's Union ruled that "any member of the Seamen's Union, being rated as an officer of a ship, shall immediately give in his [membership] book and forfeit all privileges appertaining to the Union. He shall be exempt from payment of contributions until such time as he is disrated or wishes to become a working member, then, whoever the individual may be, to be considered a financial member of the Union on payment of the current month's contribution." There was a fraternal understanding between the two bodies, and the Marine Officers' application to join the Maritime Council indicates the strength of this understanding and the extent to which they appreciated the bond of their common interest as workers for the same employers.

The approach from the Cooks and Stewards was motivated by similar considerations — but towards their union the Seamen's Union maintained a more cautious attitude. For one thing, there was the weak stand taken by it during the Northern dispute, and its failure to respond to the Seamen's first approach during that dispute for the formation of a Maritime Council. On top of this — and, in the view of many seamen, basic to it all — the Cooks' and Stewards' Union president ever since its foundation in 1884 had been a businessman called William Innes, who had a substantial interest in the Union Steam Ship Co.

Waters, the secretary of the Cooks' and Stewards' Union, read out the Maritime Council's reply to the Union's application for affiliation to a meeting of the Union in Port Chalmers on 27 November 1889. It stated quite baldly that no union could be affiliated "whilst any officers had any direct business connection with any steamship company in New Zealand". Mr Innes rose immediately and said the letter was "a personal attack" on himself, and that he "would not give way to satisfy the spleen of a few". Having great respect for the part played by Innes in the forming and running of their Union, the members let the matter drop — until events took a sharp turn in a new direction less than a year later.

Affiliation with the Maritime Council also caused minor difficulties for branches of the Seamen's Union. Already affiliated to the local Trades Councils, the Wellington and Auckland branches were loth to drop this link with other unions in their own areas. Head Office pointed out the burden of keeping up a double set of dues, and also expressed confidence that the Trades Councils themselves would be affiliating to the Maritime Council in the near future, when it had proved its practical value as an upholder of labour's cause. The branches took their cue from this advice.

In January 1890, New Zealand was celebrating its Fiftieth Birthday as a nation with a Jubilee Exhibition in Dunedin (still the largest city in the country at that time), and processions and galas of various kinds in other centres. For the first time at an official public function, the forces of trade unionism made an open display of their strength. At the Grand Parade to mark the Exhibition's opening in December 1889, hundreds of seamen marched in ranks through the streets of Dunedin behind their officers and the red and gold banner of the Federated Seamen's Union. The banner was then sent north in the

custody of the delegate on a coaster to lead the Union's Wellington branch in the big procession there on 22nd January. On both occasions, the unions affiliated to the Maritime Council were conspicuous among the marchers, and the older unions representing the "venerable crafts" such as printing, baking, and carpentry, watched with some envy the massed numbers of men whom these industrial unions were able to call out to follow their banners.

The cause of unionism was announcing that it had now achieved maturity and wasn't ashamed to show its face among the rich and respectable on an occasion of state festivity.

But the Maritime Council's days of festivity were not to last long. Almost immediately, it became involved in a series of hard-fought industrial battles, which were to climax in what was to be, till then and for many years after, the biggest industrial upheaval the country had ever known.

A strike at Petone woollen mills over the employers' dismissal of a number of workers, allegedly for forming a union (of which the Maritime Council leader, D. P. Fisher, had been elected president), had been handed over to the local Trades Council to settle, but without success. After nearly three months, the union and the Trades Council asked the Maritime Council to assist, and in a matter of days the Petone Woollen Co. had undertaken to recognise the Union and re-employ the dismissed workers.

Shortly afterwards, the Council was asked by the very moderate Amalgated Society of Railway Servants to take up the cudgels for railway labourers, who were being paid at a wide variety of hourly rates. Although the ASRS was hesitant about going to the lengths of direct action, it allowed the Maritime Council to appeal to the Premier (Atkinson), but failed in the last instance to back up the Council's demands on its members' behalf. This was a symptom of the sort of weakness on which the Maritime Council was eventually to founder.

In May 1890, the newly formed Miners' Association branch at Shag Point called its members out on strike to secure the re-employment of its President and Secretary who had been sacked by the mine-owning company, Hazlett & Glendining, for allegedly "sending up too much stone with their coal". The Maritime Council was called on to support the fight against a clear example of vindictive discrimination against unionists, but the company continued to reject all attempts at negotiation. Early in June, the Maritime Council called a press conference,

publicised all the facts of the dispute (including copies of the correspondence with the mine-owners), and announced that in view of the employer's truculent attitude the Council would have to adopt "*more forcible methods to have the rights of the men upheld*".

The Council's scheme for dealing with Hazlett & Glendining was both novel and effective. The owners of the firm were to be struck at through their other investments. The Council asked the Seamen's Union to boycott all goods consigned by or to either of the two firms Ross & Glendining or McKerras & Hazlett. In a letter to the U.S.S.Co., Millar stated that seamen would not carry such consignments, and that, should any be discovered aboard, "*we shall be compelled to stop the ship at the first port she arrives at until the goods are landed. This notice will be observed by us until the dispute at Shag Point is settled.*" The Council also called on the watersiders, carters, and storemen to support the ban.

The press expressed horror at the Maritime Council's "irresponsibility" and "extremism" in using the "weapon of boycott", especially against other businesses with which the Council had no argument, but in which the owners of a business with which they did have an argument happened also to have an interest. "*This,*" claimed one newspaper, "*is class war*". Retorted Millar: "*The victimisation of trade unionists is also class war*".

Whatever the ethics of the tactics employed by the Maritime Council, there could be no doubt about their effectiveness. The day after the seamen's ban was imposed, Hazlett & Glendining announced that the two dismissed men had been reinstated, and the firm would recognise the Union without reservation. Millar cancelled the boycott notice forthwith.

Also in May 1890, the Marine Officers' Association had served certain demands on the shipowners for the improvement of salaries and conditions, and when these demands were categorically turned down, the Association requested the Maritime Council's support in strike action. Millar, as a former ship's officer, was well placed to assess the reasonableness of the claim, and after unsuccessfully advising the Marine Officers to modify their demands, he finally obtained their assent to the Council acting as arbitrator on the claims if the shipowners would also agree. The shipowners were distinctly embarrassed by the proposal at first, but they were realistic enough to see that the only alternative was a strike, which they were not prepared to face — not yet, anyway. So the Marine Officers'

claims were submitted to arbitration by the Maritime Council, and the Council sat in July in Dunedin and heard lengthy argument between Captain Highman of the M.O.A. and Hon. George McLean, the U.S.S.Co's. Chairman of Directors. The Council's decision, which granted some but not all of the officers' claims, was unconditionally accepted by both parties.

This series of successes for the Maritime Council was soon doomed to come to an end. The sudden new vigour of unionism shown by its activities, and the overnight upthrust of new workers' organisations which had sprouted under its influence and example, struck fear into the hearts of New Zealand's employers. Labour had been obtainable cheap, and the unions were putting its price up. On top of that, they were talking in terms not only of a natural antagonism between workers and employers, but also of the desirability of a state of society in which the ownership of the means of wealth was vested in the workers themselves. The bigger employers determined at an early stage that a showdown must be arranged, and that it must be arranged in such a way as to ensure the final and decisive defeat of the unions.

The first half-yearly meeting of the Maritime Council, held in Wellington in May 1890, heard a proposal for the establishment of a labour newspaper. In fact it was more than a proposal: Millar, who had long been keen on the idea, showed delegates a dummy for a first edition prepared by members of the Dunedin Printers' Union. Several copies of this dummy newspaper survive, and they give a very clear picture of the ideas which underlay the activities of the Maritime Council. Laid out as an 8-page tabloid, it was intended to appear weekly under the name "*Labour*". The dummy carries a specially prepared woodcut masthead occupying one-third of the front page, proclaiming: "*LABOUR, the organ of Unionism. A weekly journal published in the interests of the Workers of New Zealand by the Combined Trade Unions of the Colony*".

The title is surrounded by a cluster of little pictures each representing one of the industries already affiliated to the Maritime Council or assumed to be likely joiners: shipping, mining, labouring, bootmaking, tailoring, and railway transport. These pictures converge upon a central picture of a handclasp, captioned "UNITY", and they are linked by a panel containing the famous slogan from Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* of 1848: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

If the significance of this slogan was not clear enough, the front page carried an article by Millar, intended to introduce the journal to readers. "The majority of the newspapers of New Zealand advocate the cause of capital", proclaimed the article. "The whole of them are owned by capitalists, great or small, and even the most advanced Liberal organ in the colony only advocates the cause of Labour as a matter of policy. Why then should labour not have its own organ? . . . Unionism without a journal absolutely its own must be almost as dumb as a muzzled dog. . . .

"LABOUR will be a model of Union principles. . . No boy labour, no long hours, no half-pay, no free setting of type. . . . And above all there will be no profit-mongering upon it. It will be purely co-operative. . . .

"Unionism has already raised the pay of each unionist by an average of 1s. per day. Surely a majority of unionists can find 5s., either down or in easy instalments, to secure the immense advantage of such a journal."

It was a bold declaration of the independence of the working class from the economic system: but it was ahead of its time. The proposal was temporarily postponed until more unions had affiliated to the Council and it was ensured of a sound economic future: and before that could happen, the Council had become involved in an industrial battle which commanded all its energies and ended in its destruction — and the brave journal "Labour" remained a handful of dummy run-offs gathering dust on a shelf in the office of the Seamen's Union.

The prestige of the Maritime Council among many of the old "craft" unions was high by July 1890. It had won enough battles for unions affiliated and unaffiliated to attract the faith of New Zealand workers in much the same proportion as it provoked fear and suspicion among employers. In that month, the Christchurch Trades and Labour Council requested the Maritime Council to attempt to solve a dispute between the local Typographical Society and the firm of Whitcombe & Tombs which had been dragging on for five months. The firm had refused to recognize the Union, dismissed Union members, and steadfastly refused to go to arbitration with the Trades Council on a Union proposal (already accepted by all other employers in the trade) for higher wages and better apprenticeship conditions. The Maritime Council's intervention in the matter met with no better success: the company persisted in refusing arbitration, so the Council asked other firms to co-oper-

ate in a total boycott of Whitcombe & Tombs, to be enforced by the refusal of seamen and watersiders to load, unload, or carry any goods to or from the firm. The ASRS, a body then considering affiliation to the Council, was asked to order its members to take similar action.

Events moved towards a general strike in the Lyttelton-Christchurch area when the Commissioners who were at that time responsible for running the State-owned Railways announced that any employees who refused to handle any goods would be instantly dismissed. The courage of the ASRS wilted before this threat, and though the seamen and watersiders carried on the boycott for some time, its effectiveness was broken by the surrender of the railwaymen.

This, the first defeat of the Maritime Council, did little to diminish the Council's prestige. Printers, forced to leave Whitcombe & Tombs standing on its own as a pariah among their employers, appreciated the stand the Council had taken, and regarded that body as their first real champion, although its championship had proved fruitless. The former liberal politician, Sir Robert Stout accused the Railways Commissioners of using "the power of the State" to defeat the printers by having "joined its forces with Whitcombe & Tombs against labour". Newspapers throughout the country praised the Maritime Council's stand, and deplored the position taken up by both the company and the Railways Commissioners. Quite rightly, they saw these events as heralding a head-on clash between labour and capital on a national scale. The press naturally felt that, whatever the outcome of such a clash, it could injure the interests of employers as much as those of unions. However, the voice of sweet reasonableness in labour relations was not to last much longer.

The defeat of the workers by one firm with the help of a Government Agency encouraged the employers to prepare themselves for an all-out effort to smash unionism once and for all. The strength of the Maritime Council obviously lay among the seamen and watersiders, and the role of prime mover in the anti-union offensive naturally fell on New Zealand's biggest employer of labour in the maritime industry, the U.S.S.Co.

The Maritime Council had affiliated with the Australian Maritime Council largely to combat the U.S.S.Co.'s affiliation with the Australian S.S.O.A. The connection broadened the Maritime Council's vision of class solidarity to an international horizon, and, of course, greatly strengthened its bargaining

power — but it also opened the way for involvement in a life-and-death struggle on an issue in which it had, for its own part, only a marginal interest, and on which it was difficult to maintain the enormous reservoir of sympathy which it had built up among the New Zealand public. The Australian Maritime Council had been providing sinews for the resurgence of unionism in other industries throughout Australia from mining to sheep-shearing, and there, too, the employers were poised for the offensive.

By secret agreement, the A.S.S.O.A. opened a fund in July 1890 based on a levy on capital, "for defence purposes", and it was an open secret that they were looking for an excuse for a show-down. The excuse came when the newly formed Australian Marine Officers' Association, currently engaged in negotiations with the A.S.S.O.A. on wages and hours of work, announced its affiliation to the Australian Maritime Council within weeks of the establishment of this secret fund.

The subsequent action of the A.S.S.O.A. was without a shred of moral or legal justification, and can have had no other purpose than to signal a general assault on trade unionism by organised employers. The apparent intention was to destroy unionism altogether, and restore the pre-union situation under which the sole regulators of pay rates and job conditions were the whims of the employers and the contingencies of the "free labour market". The A.S.S.O.A., itself a combination of employers designed to protect their interests as employers, suddenly refused to accept the right of one section of its employees to join any combination for the protection of their interests as employees. The shipowners calmly declared that negotiations on the Marine Officers' claim would not continue until the Marine Officers' Association agreed to disaffiliate from the Maritime Council!

The Marine Officers, less concerned perhaps about the principle involved than about placing themselves at the employers' mercy without allies, refused to sever themselves from the Council. The shipowners declared negotiations at an end. The Marine Officers called their members out on strike on 17 August, and a few days later the Australian Seamen's Union called its members out as well to force the owners to negotiate. Ten days later, acting on the request of the Australian Maritime Council, the N.Z. Maritime Council instructed the Seamen's Union to order a progressive withdrawal of its members from the ships of the A.S.S.O.A.'s only New Zealand members, the U.S.S.

Co. The *Wairarapa* and the *Te Anau* were the first two ships affected, and as soon as the seamen had walked off them the Wharf Labourers' Union notified the U.S.S.Co. that while these ships would be unloaded, their members would handle no goods consigned to be taken aboard them for the return trip. The Maritime Council then announced that if the U.S.S.Co. immediately granted its officers the wages and conditions which the A.S.S.O.A. was refusing, then the strike would be over as far as New Zealand was concerned: it was entirely in the company's hands. If the Council believed that the company would accede to these terms, then it had failed to see the prearranged strategy of the A.S.S.O.A.'s action. Far from wanting to terminate the strike as soon as possible, the U.S.S.Co., as a loyal and self-interested member of the A.S.S.O.A., was quite determined to play its part in prolonging the struggle to the death. Like all its confreres in the Owners' Association, the U.S.S.Co. had plenty of resources to withstand an industrial siege: but the funds of the Maritime Council and its constituent unions were to be quickly exhausted, and after that it would be a simple enough matter for the employers to subdue the spirit of the workers with the deadly weapon of starvation.

Meantime, the crews of three New Zealand ships arriving in Sydney had walked off rather than work with scab labour. One of the men concerned was Ben Bern, and his role in helping to organise the New Zealand seamen, officers, and stewards in Australia during the following weeks was to earn him a stiff prison sentence.

The fight was on. In a manifesto issued over Millar's signature on 27 August, the New Zealand Maritime Council declared that *"the New Zealand public cannot expect the New Zealand seamen to allow themselves to be the tools of any employers endeavouring to crush the labour organisations of Australasia. . . The seamen may regret that their action may cause a paralysis of trade but . . . their action has only been taken in self-defence"*.

The following day, the N.Z. Marine Officers' Association ordered its members off any ship "the moment a blackleg goes aboard", and instructed them to hand in their certificates to Millar until the end of the strike "as a sign of solidarity". The position of the Cooks and Stewards was uncertain at first, but a wave of revolt soon made itself felt among the rank and file of their Union against the suggestion that the seamen's fight was not necessarily theirs as well. A ballot of members resulted

in a 3 to 1 decision to strike, and a unanimous resolution was carried at a meeting of the union at Port Chalmers calling on Innes to resign as president because his position "does injury to the Union, inasmuch as it prevents them from affiliating with the Maritime Council, such being the wish of the members".

A mass meeting of the striking unions thronged the Dunedin Town Hall on 1 September, and was attended by a large section of the public interested in finding out about the dispute and clearly sympathetic with the union's case. Among the official guests on the platform were Sir Robert Stout (among other things, now President of the Marine Officers' Association), and the editor of the *Otago Daily Times*. The principal speaker was Millar, and he began with a ringing proclamation:

"Labour is one, and an injustice to one is an injustice to all!" No sane man, he declared, could admit the justice of "the shipowners amalgamating together, and wishing to keep the labour bodies separate in order to crush them one at a time." The strike could have been restricted if the U.S.S.Co. had allowed Union men to do all their work. "If only employers would open their eyes to the fact that united labour must be recognized, if they would meet us like men to discuss matters — than the days of strikes would be passed."

The spirit of the strikers at first seemed indomitable. Meeting at least weekly, and sometimes more frequently, the branches of the Seamen's Union maintained a high level of activity with full participation by members in picketing ships and keeping an eye on members who showed signs of weakening in their resolve. By 20 September, the Wellington branch had only two defectors, who were (in the words of their branch resolution) "scotch from our books as Blacklegs". The Port Chalmers branch of the Cooks and Stewards Union had to report several members as having "turned traitors to our cause, but it is to be hoped that when the whole dispute is settled, the members will be in such a position as to make it a heavy day of reckoning for them." The hope was, alas, a vain one.

The employers rapidly organised scab labour for the wharves and ships. Unemployment was rife, but, to their honour, the jobless workers were not heavily represented among the tatterdemalion labour-force that was scratched together at each port. A man who was himself a "volunteer" has de-

scribed them as "men of independent means, bank clerks, young men from the country, school teachers, members of athletic clubs". Unionists gathered alongside the wharves to jeer, but a Maritime Council instruction to unionists to "refrain from violence" was for the most part observed, though there were isolated instances where groups of scabs were pelted with stones and lumps of horse-dung. The Mayor of Dunedin went so far as to enrol "Special Constables", but as soon as this move was announced Millar sent 21 members of the Seamen's Union and 21 members of the Wharf Labourers' Union to be enrolled as well so that the interests of the strikers would be assured of impartial protection.

The Railways Commissioners, true to form, weighed in on the side of the Union Steam Ship Co. with a particularly unpleasant piece of scab-herding. In Lyttelton, where scab labour was in short supply, the Railways ordered 200 of its permanent way men to work on the wharf as scabs. The men unanimously refused and were instantly dismissed. This move, and the U.S.S.Co.'s cool action in continuing to operate its ships manned entirely with inexperienced officers and crews, provoked a debate in Parliament in which the Government affected to be "neutral", and the Liberal Opposition accused them of helping to try and break the unions. Dick Seddon, from the Opposition front bench, accused the Railways Commissioners of "attempting to provoke railways employees to go out on strike", and the Union Co. was denounced for jeopardising the safety of passengers for the sake of its own selfish interests.

The unions involved in the strike conducted public meetings in many centres, and the popular reception of their case showed that the Maritime Council still enjoyed a very high prestige among New Zealand workers. The maritime unions revived memories of the Jubilee Steamship Co. in discussing the promotion of a co-operative steamship company as a joint venture. Discussion of strike issues invariably extended into a discussion of the long-term aims of the labour movement, and it became increasingly common for public meetings of strikers and supporters to resolve in favour of "independent labour candidates" for Parliament, and to discuss planks for a Labour platform — such as compulsory arbitration, preference for unionists, the 8-hour working day, and extensions to the free education system.

The 8-hour day had long been a demand among the craft

unions in New Zealand — ever since Samuel Parnell made his successful stand for it on behalf of the carpenters of Wellington in 1840. By the 1880s, it had become a demand of the labour movement all around the world. In 1889, the Labour and Socialist International (known as the Second International) meeting at its initial congress in Paris, had issued an appeal to workers' organisations in every country to celebrate one day in the year as International Labour Day, to be marked with demonstrations demanding the legal restriction of the working day to eight hours. The day finally fixed for the northern hemisphere was 1st May, the anniversary of the commencement of the great Chicago 8-Hour Day Strike in 1886, when the deaths of eight people from the explosion of a stoolpigeon's time-bomb resulted in the frame-up and execution of four of America's finest working class leaders the following year.

The International's call reached New Zealand just too late to arrange any celebration of May Day, 1890. But responding to that call, the Maritime Council looked for an anniversary with closer associations with New Zealand. It was clear to Millar that the ancient spring festival significance of May Day in the northern half of the world had been a factor in the selection of this date, and he looked for a milestone in New Zealand working class history which had the same seasonal impact. The date finally selected by the Council was 28th October, the anniversary of the foundation of the Council itself, and also the anniversary of that Sunday morning when, according to legend at least, the working men of Wellington had gathered in front of Barrett's Pub on Lambton Quay in 1840 and resolved "*that 8 hours shall be the working day, and that anyone offending shall be ducked in the harbour*".

The selection of the 8-hour day as a rallying-cry among New Zealand workers proved an invaluable means of broadening the sense of fraternity which the Council had built up among an important section of the labour force. The newspapers of 1890 carried news of strikes and demonstrations on the 8-hour day issue from the Asturian mines to the Frisco waterfront. The New Zealand craft unions were overwhelmingly committed to the 8-hours principle, and the Maritime Council had no difficulty in gaining the thorough-going co-operation of the Trades and Labour Councils in the celebration of 28 October 1890 for the first time as Labour Day. In Wellington, practically all business closed for the day, and a

procession of over 1200 workers marched between decorated horse-drawn floats and colourful banners from the Government Buildings to Newtown Park, where an illuminated address was presented to Sam Parnell himself, the 80-year-old veteran who had initiated the 8-hours movement in New Zealand (and probably in the world) by his historic stand fifty years before.

Pride of place in this massive demonstration was taken by the Maritime Council affiliates out on strike, the Seamen's Union leading the march "in great number", followed by the Cooks and Stewards ("very smart in their white ducks"), miners, wharf labourers, wharf carters, expressmen, and storemen. One local paper, bitterly hostile to trade unionism, tried to dismiss the whole event as "*nothing more than a Maritime Council glorification, and nothing else, and too much has been inflicted upon the community by that body to render anything connected with it, except the departure for other lands of its leaders, a subject for cheering and gaiety of any kind*". Nevertheless, the same paper was forced to admit, "the procession itself was a most orderly and well-marshalled affair, and composed of as fine a body of respectably dressed men as could be found the world over."

The strikers' morale, and their popularity among their fellow citizens, were still both high at the end of October, as the events of our first celebration of Labour Day indicate. But the position which had been reached in the strike was one of stalemate. Union funds were still holding, but only just; the ships were being run, though the quality of the work performed by the scabs was a public scandal. The Maritime Council saw with great clarity that, despite the moral support which the workers' cause still had from wide sections of New Zealanders, the stoppage was causing increasing hardships and reducing the incomes of those who would otherwise be contributing to strike funds. Still the employers sat tight, refusing to compromise.

Strike pay had to be reduced to nominal amounts, and the temper of the men, determined as they were to stand solid by the principles of unionism, began to swing in favour of "admitting that we have lost the battle so we can re-form our lines to carry on the war".

Early in October, concerned about the effects of the stoppage on the economy, Parliament instructed the Government to invite employers and unions to meet in conference in Wel-

lington with a view to a settlement, but the Railways Department and the Employers' Association both refused to attend, and, though the Union Company was represented by the single person of its Chairman of Directors (McLean), he proved quite intractable. Twenty-six union representatives led by Millar confronted him across the table for several days, but he flatly refused to concede the unions' minimum demands — the right to insist that only Union members be employed, and the right to enter into any affiliations they chose. McLean expressed perfect contentment to let the struggle carry on until the Unions were ready to surrender unconditionally or become "defunct".

The Government was disappointed at the failure to achieve a settlement — and so, increasingly, were the unions. Funds had run out, and increasing numbers of demoralised workers, thrown out of employment by the effects of the stoppage in transport and coal, were offering themselves as scabs. Every post brought news of similar developments in Australia, and the advice of the Australian unions was to get the men back to work before their organisations were completely smashed.

Immediately after the failure of the Wellington conference, the Maritime Council called on all unions except the Seamen, Watersiders and Miners to return to work. A few days later, on 1 November, the Council was forced to agree to a return to work by the watersiders as well — though not before their organisation had been shattered beyond the possibility of revival. On 6 November, the strike was officially declared over in Sydney, and on 11 November the Maritime Council posted a notice telling members of the Seamen's Union, the first body to go on strike and the last to hold out, that they too were free to rejoin their ships.

The bitter industrial conflict was finished. But when it came to assessing the damage on the trade union movement, and regrouping its forces to carry on the fight for the workers' rights by other means, it became apparent that the Maritime Council was finished too. A movement which had grown up almost overnight, it had inspired the workers with the audacity of its short-term demands and its long-term vision, but it was not really prepared for the final test of this audacity under the direct hammer-blows of open conflict with the organized and wealthy forces of the master class. The iron heel of the employers, backed by the weight of almost limitless resources and ruthless determination, had smashed the strongest and

most hopeful organization that the workers of New Zealand had so far managed to build.

Some of the individual unions survived. Of these, the Seamen's Union was probably the most fortunate, for Millar's organizing ability was concentrated on holding the shell of its structure together, and though there was little activity outside of Dunedin for several years, the framework of the organization was still there to be re-animated when the exhausted spirit of its members revived.

The members who had fought the strike found jobs almost impossible to obtain. Hundreds of them took cheap passages to Britain, the United States, and South America in search of work. "Thus," wrote Millar's successor, Bill Belcher, years later, "was the flower of New Zealand unionism scattered to the four corners of the earth."

5.

GRADUAL RECOVERY: the 1890s

"The most important consequence of the Maritime Strike was, in fact, to throw the trade unions into politics."

So a French socialist writer commented years later in a book describing his observations of progressive legislation and politics during a tour of Australia and New Zealand.

There had, of course, been profound political implications behind the Maritime Council and the direct action into which it had led the greater part of New Zealand's organised working class. The Council's abortive newspaper was intended to carry on its masthead a quotation from Karl Marx, describing the kind of society in which the workers had liberated themselves from the exploitation of capitalism. During the strike, the unions had discussed the advisability of taking political as well as industrial action. Millar himself saw the strike as part of a gigantic and inevitable class struggle between capital and labour, the desirable outcome of which would be "a great, grand commonwealth where all would be employed by the State".

The quotation from Marx and the vision of a "great, grand commonwealth" indicate fairly definitely the degree of commitment among the organised workers in the Maritime Council to the political goal of socialism. But the defeat of the strike had a profound effect on the thinking of New Zealand workers about the methods by which these goals could be most practically achieved. Even though the whole weight of state power had not been brought down on the side of the employers to help smash the unions (as was to happen in subsequent struggles), the Unions were, nevertheless, fairly effectively smashed. The outward structure of the Seamen's Union remained (unlike that of the Wharf Lumpers' Union), but it was a long time before it regained the membership with which it embarked on the bitter conflict of 1890, and it took all of eight years to revive all the Branches to their pre-strike vigour.

The workers had apparently lost faith in the securing of political goals by what was known as "syndicalist" (or purely Trade Union) action. They had not lost faith in trade unionism alto-

gether: it was, after all, the only means at their disposal for obtaining day-to-day improvements in their wages and conditions of work, and of exercising any sort of self-defence against the avarice of employers. But somehow day-to-day gains and self-defence were less important to the workers of New Zealand in the immediate aftermath of the strike than the problem of survival, of getting a living, of ensuring that their wives and children had a decent life again after the long months of deprivation. They never lost faith in the ultimate goal of a better society, the vision of which had been so vividly opened to them by the Council's political propaganda: but it suddenly seemed that there might be other ways, slower but maybe more certain, of achieving this vision.

The chief means was offered in Sir George Grey's amendment to the Electoral Act of 1889 — the famous "One Man, One Vote" provision. A general election was due in December 1890, a little more than a month after the Maritime Council had formally declared the strike over, and for the first time every male wage-earner in the country would have an equal say in the choice of a new government with every landowner and businessman. The old Liberal faction in Parliament began zealously developing associations with the trade unions and radical societies. There was a mushroom crop of working-class clubs devoted to the propagating of the theories of the two American radicals, Henry George the "single taxer", and Edward Bellamy the socialist author of the books *Looking Backward* and *Equality*; and these clubs, together with the unions, represented a potential political framework for the organisation of the newly significant working-class vote.

Workers' Representation Committees were formed, and the Liberals indicated their willingness to endorse the candidature of any nominees these committees put forward. Three days after the end of the strike, it was announced that J. A. Millar was being nominated for the Port Chalmers seat, against the sitting member, James Mills — who was, incidentally, the Managing Director of the Union Steam Ship Co.

The programme with which Millar presented the electorate was mild enough, but he saw it as a piecemeal strategy for the attainment of socialism. It included the abolition of the upper house, leasehold only (and no private purchase) of Crown land, progressive land and income tax, free secondary education, equalisation of remuneration, and more effective labour laws.

There was certainly a heavy flavouring of class hate in that election campaign. The *Otago Daily Times* thundered:

"It would be difficult to find a parallel to the effrontery of the candidature for Port Chalmers of the man who has been chiefly instrumental in so recently bringing disaster upon the whole community and defeat upon the body he represents. . . But with the same desperate audacity which up till within a few days of defeat, he trumpeted forth assurances of victory, Mr Millar seeks to make his recent failure a stepping stone to personal advancement. Nay, more, he endeavours, as it were, to obtain a personal revenge upon the shipping company which has succeeded in defeating the strike he ordered by putting himself up for election against the representative of that company. . . ."

The campaign was as closely contested as it was bitter, and Millar was defeated by less than 200 votes. But this outcome in an urban constituency was exceptional. Overwhelmingly, as one newspaper commented, "Labour leaders have succeeded in making the working classes in the towns and their neighbourhoods believe that the election should be fought as a class issue." No fewer than five trade unionists were returned to Parliament, and a total of 25 members committed to support the trade union platform to which Millar had subscribed. The old Liberals won 34 seats in a house of 74, but together with Independent support, the Liberal-Labour Alliance took power with a landslide majority over the Conservatives. Only 27 members supporting the pre-election Government retained their seats.

The 1890 elections dramatised a change that had been slowly taking place in the whole shape of our national politics. New Zealand has never been quite the same since. Their immediate impact can be gauged by this comment, a few months later, in the *Sydney Bulletin*:

"Sassiety in Wellington has had its nerves jarred by a story to the effect that the female cook employed by one of the very best families asked her mistress for a loan of the morning paper, as her brother was now a member of Parliament and she wanted to read his maiden speech."

It was a long, uphill haul rebuilding the Seamen's Union in those years after the big strike, and increasing faith was placed in the ability of the new government to assist with legislative measures designed to promote unionism generally, lay

down minimum standards of working conditions, and force employers to negotiate with their aggrieved employees.

One of the largest obstacles in the way of reviving the union was certainly one which could be removed by no means other than legislation. This was the Union Steam Ship Co.'s so-called "Mutual Benefit Society", better known among the seamen as "The Deaf and Dumb Society". Membership of this organisation was made compulsory for all Company employees. It claimed (but in fact conspicuously failed) to look after all the social needs of seamen; the control was vested permanently in the Company's Board of Directors without a vestige of democratic pretence, and its subscription was as much as any seaman could afford. The sailors saw it for what it was — a vindictive attempt to smash up even what little remained of their Union, and add cruel punishment to the bitterness of defeat.

The Wellington Branch of the union, meeting with a mere 16 members three days before Christmas, 1890, had held a discussion "re the present state of things and on the advisability of our members doing their best to renovate the present state of the Union". By February 1891, the Branch was asking for financial help from Head Office to send victimized members to Australia to find work; and by July, the Branch Office was disposed of, and advantage was taken of an offer of the free use of a room in the Pier Hotel (the same building, essentially, which still stands under that name). The licensee, Thomas Seaward — better known as "Takapuna Tom" — was a former seaman who had made a fortune in the gold-fields but retained his membership in the union and did much for the survival of trade unionism in Wellington in those years.

By July 1892, the Branch was negotiating with Liberal MPs on the question of getting a Bill introduced to abolish compulsory "friendly societies" run by employers. In response to an approach by the Branch, Sir George Grey (no longer in Parliament, but very influential among its members) undertook to draft a suitable measure "to smash the Union Company's bogus organisation", but his last illness prevented him from keeping his promise. The following month, an appeal for financial support from the Broken Hill Miners' Union in New South Wales, then engaged in the second round of the Australian Maritime Council's struggle, had to be turned down. Members felt guilty about rejecting a plea from fellow unionists who had always given such selfless and loyal support to them,

but their secretary explained that they "just can't support it, considering the way the majority of our members are now taxed financially in keeping up the U.S.S.Co.'s Benefit Society and our Union."

Early in 1893, Millar made an approach to the Premier, John Ballance, to introduce a Government Bill on the subject, but within a few weeks Ballance had died without committing himself. The Wellington secretary was asked to contact the new Premier, Richard Seddon, but a few weeks later he had to report: "*I have not heard from Seddon. . . It is near impossible to get an interview with him.*" When an audience was finally obtained, Seddon declined to be committed, but suggested shrewdly that a petition should be organised among members of existing and *bona fide* friendly societies which had good grounds for resenting the U.S.S.Co.'s compulsory body. The Premier merely wished to shelve the problem, and ensure that if it was raised again it would be with the backing of some other pressure-group more politically respectable than the Union which had led the Martime Strike. The Union took the advice seriously, and spent much time and energy in organising a petition along these precise lines, and the new Attorney-General, the young radical Pember Reeves, undertook to present it for them.

Meanwhile, the Union had succeeded in persuading Reeves to introduce the first Shipping and Seamen Bill, laying down minimum standards for safety, working, and accommodation conditions aboard ships. The Union kept in close touch with Reeves and other Liberal members throughout the debates on all stages of this Bill, especially in supplying arguments to counter those of the arch-enemy, James Mills.

One of the Bill's provisions sought to extend the 72 cubic feet of accommodation space previously allowed for each member of a ship's crew for sleeping, eating, and washing, to 120 feet. Mills, echoed by other Tory MPs, had ridiculed the proposal as impracticable and extravagant, but the Union told Reeves firmly:

"A saloon passenger is supposed by law to have 120 ft., that is, the law considers 120 ft. the minimum requisite for the health and comfort of a passenger. Consequently, as a passenger is only a human being the same as a seaman, it follows that what is necessary for the health of one must be necessary for the other."

Anyway, the Union argued, the Government's new Factories Act had laid down 240 cubic feet as the minimum amount of work space for each employee ashore, "or just double what the seamen are asking for". The Wellington Branch secretary, George Newton, extended a general invitation to "some honourable members" to "*come and see for themselves the places some men have to live in*".

By August 1893, however, the Wellington secretary reported to Millar that the Shipping Bill had been held up, apparently indefinitely, and that the Friendly Societies Bill also "will not get very far this session". Seeking an explanation, he declared that, from his own observations, the Parliamentarians "seem just to be wasting time".

The same month the Northern Co., true to form, gave notice to all its crews of a £1 a month wage cut, and this was rapidly followed by a similar notice from all other employers on the coast. This, on top of the Deaf and Dumb Society's levy and the failure to move the crucial measures through the Parliamentary digestive system, gave the Union an even greater interest in the outcome of the 1893 elections. Millar stood for Port Chalmers again, and Union members campaigned vigorously for him and other Liberal-Labour candidates.

Writing to Millar on the eve of the elections, Newton sent him the Wellington Branch's best wishes, and commented:

"The only chance we have of getting the Shipping Act through is by having someone in Parliament who understands it."

It was an exciting election, with a progressive government seeking the approval of the people for the first time after three years in office, and the electorate newly doubled by the granting of the vote to women — for the first time in a national election anywhere in the world!

When the numbers went up on election night, Millar had licked his Tory opponent in Port Chalmers by 121 votes, and the number of Liberals in the House had risen from 38 to 46 — more than double the number of Tories!

By early the following year, Millar was soon discovering that the obligations of a conscientious Parliamentarian were too demanding to allow time to devote to the duties of general secretary of the Federated Seamen's Union as well. First, he gave up the secretaryship of the Dunedin Branch, which was duly filled by his old shipmate Bill Belcher, and later the

same year Belcher also took over the duties of General Secretary.

Belcher was a big man, well over 6 feet tall, and heavily built. Born in England, he had settled in New Zealand in the 1870s after an adventurous career on sailing-ships, during which he had been shipwrecked at least once and marooned for many weeks on a barren rock in the south Pacific. Dark, with beetling eyebrows and the walrus moustache that was fashionable in those days, Belcher was a formidable and forthright leader. He was later to be described as "a turbulent radical", "pugnacious" and "truculent". Tough he certainly was, and though he lacked the education and polish of his predecessor, Millar's shrewd assessment of his merits was largely responsible for the Union asking him to step into Millar's shoes.

Belcher had served for some years as Bosun on the inter-island freighter *Go Ahead* while Millar had been the ship's master. The officer had formed a high opinion of the character of the leader of his deck crew, and their comradeship had extended from rum and cards in the captain's cabin to activity together in the Union from its foundation in 1880. Based largely on this strong personal friendship, Belcher's political loyalties tended always to coincide with Millar's — even at times when the rank and file were distinctly disenchanted with the Government of which Millar became a Cabinet Minister.

The secretaryship of the Wellington branch changed hands at about the same time. George Newton, who had taken over the position of secretary-treasurer soon after the strike (and may be the same George Newton who was active in the West Coast coalfields during the 1890 and 1913 strikes), resigned after an audit revealed some confusion in the Branch finances. The job was split up, the secretaryship being taken over by Matthew Roche, with the two local radical lawyers, John Poynton and Alfred Hindmarsh as President and Treasurer. Roche insisted on facing an election later in the year when it would have fallen due under the rules, and there was considerable interest when Takapuna Tom of the Pier Hotel nominated his 17-year-old son for the position; but Roche beat his youthful challenger by a comfortable margin in the ballot. Still there continued to be difficulties in collecting subscriptions and gathering meetings together, and after September 1894 there appears to have been no real Branch activity until

mid-1895, when Roche resigned and was replaced as secretary by William Jones.

Jones had been a poor fourth in the ballot in which Roche beat Seaward Junior the previous year, and his following seems to have been strongest among the crews of the multiplicity of "rock-scrapers" or small coastal boats which carried a lot of passengers and freight around the immediate vicinity of the port of Wellington in those days. Among the men on the coasters plying further afield, and on the ships trading on intercolonial and overseas runs, he seems never to have enjoyed a very high reputation — as we shall see in the next chapter.

The difficulties of the Wellington Union, however, were negligible compared with those which faced the unionists struggling to revive the branch in Auckland. There was a good core of loyal seamen at the port, but they lacked the leadership of men of the calibre that had been offering in plenty before the 1890 strike. The branch remained in abeyance for seven years, and Auckland members paid their dues haphazardly through the delegates on southern ships that chanced into port. Former Auckland members employed by the Sugar Refining Co. on the North Shore to operate its sugar fleet, were faced with compulsory membership of another company "Benefit Society" whose subscription in proportion to wages was too exorbitant to permit the payment of Union dues as well.

Another piece of legislation in which the Union took a close interest was the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894. This gave unions much greater protection than the old Trade Union Act in return for the unconditional acceptance of compulsory arbitration of all disputes — first by conciliation through an informal machinery, but failing that, by a hearing of an Arbitration Court presided over by a Judge. The mood of the unions and their organisational situation following the events of 1890 gave them far more to gain than to lose by becoming involved in such a system. Industrially, the employers had the whip hand, and the workers saw the I.C. and A. Act as the means whereby a progressive government was endeavouring to redress the balance in the workers' favour.

That compulsory arbitration was not to be equally advantageous to the workers in times of greater prosperity seems vaguely to have been realized by some of the more far-seeing unionists — but most of them had pinned their hopes for a

better deal on the political platform of the Liberal Government, and the I.C. and A. Act was widely hailed among the workers as the first step towards ensuring such a better deal. Equally, it was widely resented by New Zealand employers as signifying "unwarranted State interference" in the operation of the "free labour market".

The machinery of the I.C. and A. Act was given a regional structure, with local unions and employers' organisations electing a number of Conciliation Boards to smooth out conflicts arising in each area. This fact actuated the Seamen's Union in encouraging its branches (which at this stage meant only the Dunedin and Wellington branches) to register under the Act as separate unions. The advantage so gained was to be offset by the serious disadvantage of promoting disunity within the Union.

In the same 1894 session of Parliament, the Shipping and Seamen Bill was re-introduced. Millar, who had largely drafted the Bill, delivered his maiden speech as an M.P. in the debate on it. An Opposition member had declared that the sole purpose of the Bill was "*to get back the power which the seamen had lost during the strike*". Millar replied that it sought "*nothing but the barest justice for seamen*", and that its opponents were "special pleaders for the Union Steam Ship Company". Existing legislation governing the conditions of seamen had not substantially altered in thirty years, while "every other class had progressed".

After exhaustive debate, the Bill went through, though it had great difficulty in passing the Legislative Council. Roche described the debate on the Bill among "the fossils" of the upper house: "*One venerable fraud said it was 'the most diabolical measure ever brought before a legislative body.'*" Nevertheless, as part of the Government's effort — inspired by Pember Reeves — to secure the permanent loyalty of the trade union movement, the Bill was pushed through, but the form in which it was passed offered seamen much less protection than the original draft.

Millar also proposed a revised version of the Benefit Societies Bill, but it was shelved again. The Union was convinced that the Government was "*playing into the hands of Hon. George McLean in a sort of give-and-take way*", and had bought his support on other matters by dropping the measure designed to terminate anti-Union "Deaf and Dumb Societies".

Whatever the truth of these allegations, the slow progress

with labour measures made trade unionists extremely cynical about the effectiveness of the Liberal-Labour alliance. Roche wrote to Belcher late in 1894, suggesting that Labour should form "a separate party and stand by whichever side will give us most. I cannot see any other way for Labour to get its rights. . . We have a good example of what a small party, well led, can do in the Irish Party in the House of Commons. *I would sooner see six men in the House of Representatives working together than twenty the way they are split up now with King Seddon making tools of them.*"

Despite setbacks, the Union was slowly building up its strength through the early 1890s. By 1895 there were 300 members in Dunedin and 200 in Wellington. A circular from the executive, aimed at recruiting non-members into the Union, reported that "the lamentable feeling of distrust and suspicion which unfortunately existed among the men is rapidly being cleared away. . . *If we allow the employers to get the upper hand the same as the U.S.S.Co. has done, and the Auckland Sugar Refining Co., they would soon crush us out of existence altogether — so it behoves every man to stick together for his birthright — freedom!*"

Tom Young, a rank-and-file member of the union who was to be prominent at a later stage, is first mentioned in Union correspondence in 1895 as the delegate on a ship visiting Auckland who was able to obtain a copy of the Sugar Co's "Benefit Society" rule-book for the Union to study.

The Private Benefit Societies Bill was once more rejected in 1895, and when a heavily backed petition supporting the Bill was not presented before the Bill's rejection in the upper house, there were accusations of "underhand work". Then came suspicions inside the Union that Millar might be less dedicated to their interests as a politician than he had been as a Union official. "Mr Millar ought to try to use a little more energy," wrote Jones to Belcher, "and try to get to the bottom of the mischief".

Still, the morale of the men was definitely on the mend, and the Union's participation in the Labour Day demonstration in Wellington that year (organised by the Trades Council) was reported to be "the biggest turnout of seamen this side of the 90 strike". Speeches delivered to the demonstration by Premier Seddon and two of his Cabinet colleagues, Reeves and Ward, indicated the official identity of the trade union movement with

Liberal politics, but the cynicism among seamen about the depth of the Liberal Government's dedication to trade union aspirations continued to grow. The majority sentiment in the labour movement still remained steadfastly loyal to the "Lib-Lab" alliance in spite of all knocks, and late in 1895 the Wellington Trades Council took the initiative in forming a "Workers' Political League" affiliated to the Liberal Party.

Again, as in the 1880s, the Seamen's Union took responsibility for helping to organise unions among the watersiders in the 1890s. In 1895, Jones accepted election as secretary of the first Wharf Labourers' Union to be formed in Wellington since the strike. It is significant that no watersiders' union was reformed in Auckland until some years later, after a solid branch of the Seamen's Union had been established there. The seamen found their natural allies in the industrial movement among this other section of non-"craft" unionists in the same industry, and, as before, it was these two groups, together with the miners, that were to spearhead developments during the decades to come. These were the sections of the New Zealand working class to be earliest disillusioned with "Lib-Lab" politics and the arbitration system.

Seamen's mistrust of the "Lib-Lab" tie-up was highlighted by their objections to the right being given to the Trades Councils rather than to separate unions to elect the first workers' representatives on the Arbitration Court in 1895. The following year this mistrust was reinforced by Reeves's resignation from the Cabinet to be sent as New Zealand's diplomatic representative in London. Wrote Jones to Belcher: *"In losing W.P. Reeves we have lost our best advocate of the Labour laws of this country. . . Our chances of reform are small if left to Dick Seddon to deal with."*

In 1896, New Zealand sent a delegate to the Australian Seamen's Union conference for the first time since the strike. The restitution of wage-cuts effected in 1890 had been announced in Australia, and the New Zealand Union saw that the only way to ensure the spread of this development across the Tasman was to show that the two unions still had a vital connection. The general secretary, Bill Belcher, was sent to take part in the Australian Union's deliberations.

The same year, following an interview between the Premier and Wellington trade union representatives, Seddon promised Jones that Millar's Private Benefit Societies Bill would be introduced that session as a Government measure. The Union S.S.

Co., faced by the likelihood of this measure becoming law, and provoked by widespread criticism of its "doctrinaire anti-unionism" in liberal newspapers, opened negotiations on recognition of the Union for the first time since the Maritime Strike. But doubts were cast on the company's sincerity because of the flat refusal of its Deaf and Dumb Society to pay any compensation or assistance to a Union member called McCann who had had a hand amputated as a result of an injury received during employment on one of the company's ships. The Society's excuse was a rule banning members of the Union. McCann had contributed to the Deaf and Dumb Society (as well as to the Union) for years, and yet, as soon as he was disabled on the job, he became entirely dependent on subscription lists circulated among Union members. By publicising the facts of McCann's case, the Union was able to arouse a good deal of public opinion in favour of the Benefit Societies Bill before the 1895 Parliament opened.

Encouraged by these developments, the Union felt able to face up to some of the job grievances arising out of the deplorable deterioration of working conditions on ships since 1890. Overloading of ships, especially with deck cargo, had become a regular practice with the inexperienced scab crews employed during and after the strike. For the first time the Union had enough members aboard one overloaded ship to take an effective stand on the issue in 1896. The ship was the *Waihora*, and when the Union secretary came aboard her in Wellington with the Tide Surveyor, the mate ("a knight of the scabs of 90") tried to intimidate the crew into informing him "who had been the cause of having this kind of thing done". When the Surveyor ordered a considerable quantity of cargo to be off-loaded before sailing, the mate threatened that "all hands would be discharged" — but he was powerless to carry out the threat. A month later, the *Kahu* was similarly inspected when the Plimsoll line was seen to be a foot under water. This time the whole deck cargo was put back ashore.

1896 also saw repeated efforts to re-establish the Union's Auckland branch. Jones wrote to one "old union man", Tom Mansell, who was working on a boat out of Auckland, describing the "very flourishing position" of the Union in the south, and pointing to the example of the *Monowai* crew who by joining the Union together had forced a £1 a month wage rise. "*If the seamen of Auckland do not combine to help themselves, how can they expect anyone else to help them?*" Man-

sell passed the letter on to a younger man, F. W. Marks, who undertook to collect subscriptions and recruit new members in Auckland until a branch could be formed.

Meantime difficulties were apparent in the existing branches. It was hard to convince Dunedin and Wellington seamen that the Union could achieve anything through the I.C. and A. Act. Members expressed the view that "the process of arbitration seems to take a great deal of time in setting matters to rights". At the same time, they were even more suspicious about the possibility that the Union might at some point be tempted to use the strike weapon again. The bitter experience of 1890 had been traumatic. In these conditions both the bold and the cautious were suspicious of unions, though they retained a sentimental regard for the cause of Unionism.

Diminishing membership in Dunedin and Wellington provoked some discussion between Belcher and Jones as to whether it was best to work "as it were on a false bottom by giving rosy reports of fictitious prosperity" or to "state the exact position of affairs" and expect the men to "*rally round the Union all the stronger*". It was becoming apparent that the passing of the Private Benefit Societies Bill was essential to the real revival of the Union, and Jones spent much time in daily visits to Parliament House until he finally encountered Seddon and "stuck him up. He was not in a good humour and would not listen and said he had no time, business to attend to. etc., etc., *but I hung onto him and got a quarter of an hour with him in his room.*" Evasive on the Benefit Societies Bill, Seddon blustered about some proposed amendments to the Shipping and Seamen Act, but Jones assured him these were of much less importance, and Seddon finally "promised to push matters".

Backed with a new welter of petitions from other established Benefit Societies (which had been losing seagoing members to the U.S.S.Co.'s compulsory body), the Union was able to flog the Bill along as far as a second reading in the upper house — further than it had ever been before. But here it was lost in a crucial division, and the Union was bitter about the fact that "*so-called Labour members*" of the chamber were unaccountably absent when the vote was taken.

From Auckland came news that, while efforts to revive a branch of the Federated Seamen's Union had failed, a new Seamen and Firemen's Union had been formed there under the aegis of the local Trades Council, with Mr Boonstra, an immi-

grant from the Netherlands, as its secretary. Marks, unsuccessful in recruiting members for the F.S.U., sent back the supply of membership books he had received from the south, and expressed confidence that the new union would ultimately affiliate as a body to the F.S.U. Conditions doled out by the Northern Co., however, continued to be well behind those granted by employers further south, and Jones commented to Belcher that Auckland seamen "*seem to have settled down to a life of slavery and take it as a matter of course*".

The 1896 elections were again the occasion for feverish Union participation in the political arena. The repeated failure of the Private Benefit Societies Bill to pass through Parliament had disenchanted many members with the Liberal machine, but the selection of the Vice-President of the Wellington Union, John Hutcheson, as official Liberal candidate for Wellington City revived the hope that, "with two practical seamen in the House, much good can and must be done". Hutcheson, a businessman who had been a working sailor and a loyal unionist through the 1880s, made even more of an issue of the Benefit Societies Bill on the hustings than Millar did. He delighted one Wellington audience by referring to the U.S.S.Co.'s Deaf and Dumb Society as "*a blood-sucking octopus*".

The elections resulted in the loss of a few seats by the Liberals, but they retained power, and did so firmly committed to the abolition of compulsory "benefit" societies. The U.S.S.Co. had meanwhile agreed to recognise the Union, but still refused to remove the compulsory provision from their benefit society. The Union followed up the achievement of recognition by the biggest employer in the industry with a demand for a £1 a month wage rise (which was — incorrectly — rumoured to have been granted in Australia), together with the dissolution of all compulsory "benefit" societies run by employers. A few small employers granted the wage rise straight away, fearful of the outcome if the case went to arbitration, but most refused, waiting to see what the U.S.S.Co. would do. The big firm finally announced its intention of contesting the demand through the machinery of the Arbitration Act, and separate hearings of the Conciliation Board in Dunedin and Wellington heard the Company offer a 10s. wage rise, and the abolition of the compulsory clause in the Deaf and Dumb Society's rules as from 30 September 1897. The Chairmen of the Boards, despite their theoretical independence and impartiality, both re-

jected the Union's "demand" in favour of the company's "offer", and a number of the smaller companies which had already agreed to pay £1 increase used the decision as an excuse for cutting back by 10s.! Still, the most significant part of the decision was the removal of the burden of compulsory membership to the Deaf and Dumb Society from the shoulders of U.S.S.Co. employees — and though this was only granted under the shadow of a forthcoming law abolishing compulsory benefit societies altogether, it had an historic effect on the industry and the Union. The Deaf and Dumb Society's membership melted away overnight, and the Union immediately enjoyed a large new influx of members.

In May 1897, the Dunedin Branch President, James Watt, signed an "Instruction" to Belcher to travel to Auckland "to ascertain what prospects there are of establishing a self-supporting branch of the F.S.U. at that port. Should it appear that the circumstances are sufficiently good, you will organise the Branch, and see that it is registered under the provisions of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act. After which, you will endeavour to make the conditions of employment for the men there uniform with those obtaining at other ports."

Belcher's Auckland visit was a brilliant success. Within a month, he had succeeded in registering an Auckland branch of the F.S.U., with a veteran of the 90 strike, J. K. Kneen, as its secretary. Within three months, the membership of the new branch had surpassed that of the existing Seamen and Firemen's Union, and members of that body were deserting it in favour of the F.S.U. By November, demands had been served on the Northern Co. and other Auckland shipowners for wage rises and improvements in conditions in conformity with those agreed with the U.S.S.Co., and as a result of a prolonged hearing by the Conciliation Board, these were granted in full in January 1898.

With Deaf and Dumb Society abolished, Union activity revived in Auckland, and with uniform conditions applying to seamen throughout the country, the Union was now for the first time in a position to recover all that had been lost in 1890 and the subsequent wage-cut of 1893. All the awards of 1897 were due to expire in February 1899, and the Union began the practice of circulating members on ships, as well as branches, for proposed improvements to be incorporated in a new national agreement to be negotiated with effect from that date.

A claim was duly forwarded to the U.S.S.Co. for £7 for ABs and trimmers, £9 for firemen and greasers, 4-hour deck watches, 4 hours on and 8 hours off in the stokehold, 1s. 6d an hour overtime for all hours outside 6 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven public holidays a year (including Labour Day) to be "Mondayised" when they fell on a Sunday, preference for unionists, and the right of union representatives to visit men aboard Company vessels in their own time. The Company duly rejected the claim (on the grounds that it would "add considerably to our expenditure" and that "no reason has been advanced to justify these demands"), and it went to conciliation before the Otago Conciliation Board late in 1899, with Belcher as the Union's advocate.

Belcher had a flair both for the careful preparation of a case based on facts and figures, and for an impressively forthright style of oratory. After demonstrating that the U.S.S.Co. had gained at least £81,148 by the wage-cut six years earlier, he contrasted the "simplicity with which it had been effected" with "the subsequent efforts that were and are now being made to regain that which was taken away". The former was "*a conclusion arrived at by a few interested individuals who held enormous power in their hands*", and yet "*it requires all the expensive machinery of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act to hear and adjudicate on the merits of regaining that which was so easily taken away*".

Countering the Company's argument that they had already restored half the cut, which was more than had been done in Australia, Belcher declared that "to take credit for being only half as bad as someone else is very poor praise", and he cited authorities to the effect that New Zealand was now "extremely prosperous" and that "it is doubtful if anyone benefits more by such a condition of things than the shipowner". He proved that the total annual cost of resoring the wage level would be £7,000 a year, "small and insignificant" compared with the company's annual expenditure of almost £300,000.

The seamen had an incomparably tougher life than any shore worker, and should be adequately compensated. His quarters aboard were "a dog-hole 6 ft. high by 6 ft. long by 2 ft. wide, in which to eat, sleep, and sometimes die"; he was "absolutely at the disposal of those in authority over him", and "the slightest remonstrance is usually followed by a curt dismissal from the ship". The ports on the New Zealand coast are "conveniently situated to allow the maximum work being

extracted out of those who man the vessels", and the New Zealand coastal trade had a bad record for loss of life.

"It has become an established usage amongst the capitalistic class that financial and management responsibilities must be rewarded with high remuneration. If that is applicable where monetary conditions are concerned, *how much more necessary is it that men should be well paid where they risk their very lives in following a dangerous calling!*" thundered Belcher.

Supporting the Union's case as a witness, the new Wellington secretary Tom Young testified that on one U.S.S.Co. boat men started work at 6 a.m. on a Wednesday and by 8 p.m. on Thursday they had been allowed no more than 3½ hours sleep, so that they were unable to "do their duty to the interests of their employers or their constitutions". Hon. George McLean snapped: "*That was in 1896?*" "*No,*" retorted Young, "*it was last Wednesday!*"

The company fought the wage increase on the basis that "the seamen are already treated better than the company's shareholders" (!) and any improvement in conditions on the basis that crew meals "are nearly as good as that which was served in the cabin". But the strongest resistance came to the preference proposal (referred to as "*interference with the inviolable right to employ whomsoever one chooses*") and the right of entry proposal (which was said to mean that "a man who stands in no relation to the owner of the boat should have an absolute right to go on board at any time outside working hours and stay there as long as he likes as free as if he were sitting in his own house").

The outcome of the conciliation, duly stamped as an Award of the Arbitration Court in December 1899, granted an extra £1 a month to men on 6-hour watches, restricted unpaid overtime after 5 p.m. on days of arrival in port which were Sundays or holidays to half an hour, and required that the shipowners "in employing labour shall not discriminate against members of the Union" — but this was about the sum total of significant advances made on existing conditions. It was apparent that the Union would have to flex its muscles much more if it was to wield as much bargaining power as it had possessed before the Maritime Strike.

The paucity of improvements won through the Arbitration Act, in which the seamen (like most workers) had placed so much faith, was to shatter that faith completely in the years to follow.

6.

DISRUPTION REARS ITS HEAD: 1898

“When two strong men stand face to face” — that is when the testing-time comes, according to Kipling’s well known verse History seems to suggest that, if the point over which they are facing each other is one of genuine principle, then their one difference of opinion will overshadow all they have in common. They find it far harder to shake hands than to fight it out to the finish.

The seagoing life was a tough one in the last century, as this story has shown. Harsh conditions helped shape the Union in many ways, but not all of these ways were exactly helpful to its smooth operation. They certainly promoted a determination among the members to fight for improvements — and, once battle had been joined with the employers, these men always showed a degree of solidarity which was the envy of many weaker Unions.

But this same spirit of revolt often expressed itself in a kind of rugged individualism among the members, a questioning of Union policies, a super-militancy amounting almost to “sheer cussedness”, and a refusal to compromise on issues of internal Union politics which was several times to lead to serious disruption of the work of the Union itself.

The history of the New Zealand Seamen’s Union has probably been punctuated by more serious internal disputes than any other union in the country. Internal dissension has several times resulted in the abrupt dismissal of personalities whose past leadership and positive contribution to the Union’s cause could not be doubted. Sometimes these events have seemed to be accompanied by such a lack of sentiment, or even of charity, that the events themselves take on in retrospect the appearance of mere struggles for power or dogfights between personalities. But closer analysis reveals that this appearance is usually misleading and superficial.

Personalities, it is true, have played an important part in the history of the Union. No Union has ever been led by a suc-

cession of more clear-cut and strong-minded characters: but it would be singularly short-sighted to look no further than the personal eccentricities of these men, and to ignore the conditions that produced them and the policies that they stood for. The events of history often present themselves in the form of a conflict of personalities, but we wouldn't learn much from history if we reduced it to these terms.

Strong personalities were forged in the hardship of life aboard the early steamers, and the struggle against those hardships. It took determination to stand up against those conditions, just as it took toughness to endure them. And when two strong personalities, two tough and determined seamen, stood face to face to argue a point of policy inside the Union, the impact of the conflict was bound to make its impression. But it was the policies they were arguing about that were the most significant things for the Union and what it stood for. The rank and file, after all, the members who listened to the arguments and took sides, were just as much personalities as the men who were arguing; and the outcome of the argument in every case has been the final result of the collective judgement of all these personalities as to which of the conflicting policies conformed to their best interests and those of the Union which represented them.

There had been internal disputes before 1898, but they had all been resolved without open disruption. The first real split came in 1898, and the cause of the split was an argument over the political loyalties of the Union — a subject which had (as we have seen) assumed importance only since 1890.

William Jones, secretary of the Wellington Branch, was a strong-minded man with a profound mistrust of politicians. William Belcher, the general secretary in Dunedin, was an equally strong-minded man, with deep ties of personal loyalty to his predecessor, Millar — who was now an influential Government Member of Parliament.

The Seamen's Union had taken a keen interest in politics ever since the events of 1890 had shown up the weaknesses of purely industrial action. Much Union energy had gone into lobbying Parliamentarians for support for labour and maritime legislation, and in the formation of organizations aiming at independent working-class representation in Parliament. Millar had originally stood for Parliament in 1890 as an independent Labour candidate with Trades Council backing, and was

Workers' Political Committee (of which Belcher soon became elected in 1893 as nominee of the newly formed Dunedin Chairman), and was endorsed by the Liberal Party machine, to which the Workers' Political Committees became affiliated.

In the campaign which secured his election, Millar claimed to be standing "as a Radical, not as a Liberal", and to be an independent, and if necessary critical, supporter of the Liberal Government; but, once elected, he became increasingly involved in the politics of the Government, and was eventually called to a seat on its front bench in 1906.

The influence of Millar and Belcher on the policies of the Union was as strong throughout the 1890s as their personalities themselves. While pressing for specific legislative action which was not always official Liberal policy, the Union became virtually committed to a political position of uncritical support for the Seddon Administration. It was against this background that the Jones-Belcher dispute began, which was to end in the disaffiliation of the Wellington Branch of the union and the infliction of a wound in the Union's solidarity which it took more than a decade to heal.

Sir Robert Stout, the Dunedin lawyer and former Prime Minister who had given strong support to the Union during the Maritime Strike, had been the Liberals' leader in Parliament for many years, but it was John Ballance who led them to power in 1890, and presided over the radical government of the next few years. When Ballance died in 1893, it was commonly said that if Stout had been in Parliament at the time he would have beaten Seddon for the leadership. But there was a strong personal antipathy between Stout (lawyer, intellectual, rationalist, prohibitionist) and Seddon (small businessman, little educated, tough, hard-drinking, with all the "pioneer" suspicions of "cranky ideas"), and once Seddon had become Premier, it was impossible for Stout even to accept official Liberal support. Running as an independent, he had been elected for a Wellington constituency, and had proved a very valuable irritant to the Liberal Government, supporting its radical measures but often criticising it from a more radical standpoint than its own, and steadily championing the political aspirations of the labour movement. He was, in short, the sort of Parliamentarian that Millar had claimed he was going to be; and the Union, despite its official political loyalties to the Government, often approached Stout to voice its views in Parliament. A strong personal friendship arose between

Stout and Jones, the man with whom he had frequent dealings as the Union's representative in the capital city.

In 1898, Seddon carried out one of his shrewdest political coups by persuading Stout to resign from Parliament and resume full-time legal practice, with the promise of being appointed Chief Justice the following year. The removal of the Government's most effective critic in Parliament precipitated a by-election for the vacant Wellington seat. This was regarded by the Liberal Party as an important occasion for increasing its unquestioning support in the House, and the Seamen's Union called on the Wellington Branch to support the Government candidate. The Wellington Branch, however, had already committed itself to support another candidate who (after failing to secure the official Liberal-Labour nomination) had decided to run as an independent carrying on the radical tradition of Stout — with Stout's approval and assistance. The Wellington Branch of the Seamen's Union unquestionably had the right to support the candidacy of a genuine unionist for the Labour nomination; but once the official candidate had been selected, the Branch might have been expected to put principles before personalities, and swing its support behind the chosen Labour man. Instead, with the active encouragement of Jones and the Branch President Alfred Hindmarsh, the Branch had leant open support to the man they had originally nominated, to stand as an independent candidate.

This action was strongly condemned by Belcher and the Union's Head Office Branch, but it was clearly the Wellington Branch's own business and constituted no breach of the rules. Belcher was thus powerless to act until, a few months later, the Wellington Branch authorised Jones to sue the *New Zealand Times*, the Wellington daily paper which supported the Liberal Party, for libelling him in a report concerning the ballot for the Labour nomination for the by-election. An enquiry from Head Office as to what authority the Branch might claim to use its funds for a libel litigation revealed the fact that Jones and Hindmarsh had already registered an amended set of rules for the Wellington Branch without so much as informing Head Office!

After repeated efforts to persuade the Branch back into line, the Head Office branch conducted a ballot of the entire membership under independent scrutineers and returning officers on two separate issues: the acceptance or rejection of the Union's national rules, and approval or disapproval of the

removal from office of the Wellington Branch president and secretary. The rules were endorsed by 478 to 4, and the removal of Hindmarsh and Jones by 424 to 50.

There was a strong feeling among the Wellington members that the stand taken by Head Office in Dunedin was primarily political, and that Belcher (and, by implication, Millar) had tied the Union up too closely with the Liberal Party machine to the detriment of its independence in relation to the Liberal Government. Very few Wellington members were persuaded to participate in the ballot on the dismissal of their Branch officers, and less than fifty of them attended a special meeting called in Wellington by Belcher to put the Head Office case.

Replying to the charge that he was trying to stop the libel action against the Liberal *N.Z. Times* "for political motives", Belcher told this meeting: *"Whatever my political opinions are, I keep them to myself. In Dunedin we keep politics out in the street, where, so far as trade unions are concerned, they should be kept. The best thing the Wellington branch can do is to get out the political element. Once it gets a footing inside, it will eventually break up the Union."*

Coming from a man who was Chairman of the Liberal Party's organisation in Dunedin, this may have sounded insincere. In fact, however, Belcher seems to have been quite genuine in his efforts to dissociate his politics from the Union. He believed that the Union should throw its solid weight behind political endeavours that had majority support from working class quarters, and consistently opposed the introduction of political sectarianism into Union affairs. When, some years later, Belcher was confronted by a majority of Union opinion favouring dissociation from the Liberal Party and an attempt to form an independent Labour Party, he loyally carried out the majority decision, despite his own dedicated commitment to the Liberals. While doing his best to persuade the majority to a different opinion, and even taking the precaution of trying to arrange a political escape-hatch for himself in the event of the members tossing him out along with the old Liberal political line, Belcher continued to serve the Union faithfully as its general secretary for a number of years.

Belcher's main attack on Jones and the Wellington Branch policy concerned the change of rules and the use of Branch funds for a libel action on behalf of one of its officers. The former action he referred to as *"Wellington's declaration of*

independence", and described it as disruptive of the national strength and unity of the seamen's cause.

"In a short time, the agreements with the shipping companies will fall in," he told the Wellington meeting, *"and the probability is that the Union will have a strongly marshalled force to meet. If the Union is torn asunder, if there is want of unanimity amongst its members, it will go to the wall."*

"The Dunedin branch doesn't want to be autocratic," declared Belcher "but it is the Head Office of the Union, and as such is going to insist that the rules be carried out strictly in accordance with the constitution, and nothing more."

Not only had the Branch been wrong to authorise the use of its funds for private litigation, but the litigation itself was ill-advised. "Why," declared Belcher, "if I were to bring a libel action every time mud was thrown at me by southern newspapers, I would *always* be in the Supreme Court."

In spite of this difference of opinion, however, he was prepared to pay homage to his opponents: "Messrs Hindmarsh and Jones have, up to a certain point, done very good work for the Union. *Jones versus Belcher is not the question — but the interests and cohesion and integrity of the seamen's organisation.*"

It was an impressive case, well stated. But it did not persuade a majority of even the minority of Wellington seamen who turned up to hear what the General Secretary had to say. One active member who approved heartily of the Head Office case was Tom Young, one of the Wellington Branch's vice-presidents, a onetime seaman currently working ashore and running the Steamboat Restaurant in Waring Taylor Street. Young rose to his feet when Belcher sat down, to move a long resolution deploring the internal dissension in the Union, approving the dismissal of the Wellington Branch officials, and condemning the stand taken by the Wellington Branch as *"not consistent with the principle of unionism"*. But when it was put to the vote, it was lost by 12 votes to 16, with a large number of abstentions.

Belcher returned to Dunedin and reported the lack of headway made among Wellington members. On Head Office branch instructions, Jones and Hindmarsh were formally notified of their dismissal. The Wellington Branch responded by reaffirming its faith in the dismissed officials, and was promptly disaffiliated. Pending the formation of a new branch, Tom

Young was appointed as Wellington Agent of the Federated Seamen's Union.

The formation of a new branch, however, presented many difficulties. Back in 1895, at Belcher's suggestion, the Wellington Branch had registered separately under the I.C. and A. Act to enable it to have local disputes settled through the machinery of the Act without going through Head Office, and to give the Branch a direct vote in the membership of the local Conciliation Board. Once registered as a separate organisation in the name of "Wellington Branch of the Federated Seamen's Union of N.Z.", the Branch had legal recognition as a separate entity, and furthermore, no other organisation could be registered with the same name.

There was nothing for it but a long war of attrition between a group forming around Young and recognised by the national Union, registered as "Wellington Branch of the F.S.U. of Australasia" on the one hand, and on the other hand the Jones Union, using the old name although it had no connection whatever with the F.S.U. of New Zealand, and had in fact been specifically disaffiliated from it!

Years later, a functionary of Jones's Union recorded that "Jones's Union died, and Young's Union was the only seamen's organisation in Wellington." It sounded simple enough, but the death of Jones's Union was a very long drawn-out affair. In 1899, Young's Union still had no members, and Jones's Union had 554. But soon after this, Wellington seamen travelling on coasters which called at other ports with Union branches began to appreciate the value of the Federation and the disadvantage of not belonging to it, though Jones continued to hold the fealty of many of the crews of small boats plying exclusively inside the Wellington Harbour and along the provincial coastline. By 1902, Young had 372 members to Jones's 345, and by 1906 Young had 736 to Jones's 162.

At this point, Jones made a "confidential" approach to Young for re-amalgamation. Young responded to the offer to the extent necessary to establish that it was at least apparently genuine, and then laid the matter before the Executive Council of the F.S.U. which was meeting in Wellington in October, 1906. The approach from Jones's Union came as a complete surprise to the Council. Young's Union had by now so far outstripped Jones's "rock-scraper" union, that the national body was quite content to leave things alone and let Jones's union

die in peace. However, the Council sent a message to Jones that it would meet a delegation from his union to discuss terms, and the delegation (consisting solely of Jones himself) duly arrived to engage in a bit of hard bargaining in one of the small rooms off the old Trades Hall in King's Chambers, Lambton Quay.

Negotiations lasted most of a day, and ended in stalemate. The Federation refused to countenance the resignation of Young and other officials of its Wellington branch to face a fresh election immediately after amalgamation, with only Wellington members participating — especially as the rules of the F.S.U. provided for nationwide elections for all Branch positions; and Jones flatly refused to reveal his Union's financial position until amalgamation had been formally agreed upon. Jones withdrew, apparently confident that the Council, in the interests of unity, would accede to his terms, and, incidentally, extricate him from a position which was becoming personally embarrassing. But the Council decided that no further action should be taken. Jones was left to stew in his own juice.

Jones's union membership had dwindled to 92 by 1910, while Young's had grown to 1,021. Years later, Young recorded that "In 1911, Jones's union died a natural death". When asked, "Are you sure it wasn't a violent death?", Young replied that, as far as its internal components were concerned, he couldn't say whether it was violent or not, "but Jones left very suddenly". The rump of Jones's members dissolved their organisation and made unconditional applications for membership in the *bona fide* union, which were granted without question.

So ended the first major split in the ranks of the Seamen's Union, and while it was not without its legacy of resentment and bitterness, it did set a pattern for the rational settlement of internal disputes by the firm enforcement of majority rule.

7.

RESURGENT MILITANCY: 1900-1911

The elections of 1899 had increased the Liberal Government's majority, but it was very much at the expense of its radicalism. Seddon's election campaign had been designed to appeal to the small farming and middle class vote. It had renounced any wish to continue "wild social experiments", and had cunningly cashed in on the outbreak of the Boer War to flap the bunting of Empire and rattle the hardware of jingoism. Having attended the Imperial Premiers' Conference in connection with Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee since the previous election, Seddon was able quite successfully to pose before conservative sections of the population as a safe and loyal supporter of established institutions. The radical voices which had dominated the early 1890s had been muted in many ways — Reeves and Stout "kicked upstairs", labour representatives overwhelmed by an influx of bandwagon-jumpers — and their muffled protests were readily drowned out by the clamour of patriotic songs and military bands. New Zealand sent a bigger contingent of soldiers to serve the Empire in South Africa, in proportion to population, than any other country. . . .

As the 1890s had opened with a fresh faith in political action among the trade union movement, the 1900s opened with a fresh disillusionment in political action. As the decade progressed, that disillusionment became stronger, and faith tended to polarise around syndicalist action or an independent political labour movement. As in the 1890s, the prevailing trends in the trade union movement in the 1900s presented themselves in microcosm among the members of the Seamen's Union.

Writing to the secretary of the Pacific Coast Seamen's Union in San Francisco early in 1901, Tom Young expressed the typical unionist's view in describing the operation of New Zealand's system of compulsory arbitration. He gave the system full credit for helping foster unionism in times when the going was tough, but he criticised it for its expensiveness (which meant that employers could invariably mount the more impressive case), and for the fact that it sapped the moral

consciousness of unionists by removing the responsibility for improving their conditions from their own shoulders to the cold mechanisms of the law.

"I do not believe in the legal method of manufacturing unionists, which is in reality the effect of our law," wrote Young. "The 'moral'-made unionist is 99% of more value to the cause than the 'legal' one. Between the old system of Strike and the new, speaking from experience, I personally prefer the old, and would revert to it. The new has morally killed unionism in this country and placed the working of unions and their internal government onto the shoulders of their responsible officers. . . We are at present in the height of prosperity. The industrial legislation will be put to a test in the time of depression."

These words of dissent were cautiously expressed, but the same sentiments were repeated with increasing bitterness during the opening decade of the twentieth century, and increasingly Tom Young found himself supported by the rank and file in demands for more militant action by the Union. But memories of 1890 had left an ambiguous heritage: the spirit of loyalty was still there to be invoked, but the wormwood of deprivation followed by defeat, and the subsequent dependence on political influence and legal reforms, had built up a resistance to the use of direct action which it was to take another ten years and more to overcome.

During the next few years, Belcher himself was to become convinced of the desirability of strike action outside the Arbitration machinery — but he was to retreat rapidly from this position when he found it adopted by others whose political assumptions were very different from his own. His approach rested on the belief that an occasional industrial confrontation of the old style might be necessary to "make arbitration work": but the growing sentiment among the transport and mining workers who had been involved in the 1890 debacle was that confrontation should replace arbitration, that the I.C. and A. Act was "labour's leg-iron", and that the "Lib-Lab" alliance which had spawned it was merely a cunning device for silencing the voice of Labour by yoking it politically to the middle class.

Belcher's political commitment to the Liberal Party was complete, and it was not to be shaken by the mere conviction that a particular piece of Liberal legislation didn't give the

workers all they wanted. His dedication to the cause of the seamen was just as passionate as that of his left-wing critics, but he refused to see any conflict between his political and industrial loyalties. On the contrary, he argued that the way to improve the lot of the seamen was to increase the Liberal Party's debt to them by *stepping up* their participation in its political machine. He was quite prepared to supplement this activity with strategically timed token stoppages when necessary — but as soon as a general movement among the workers towards strikes and away from arbitration became identified with a separate and distinctly Socialist political movement, Belcher resisted it strongly. Kneen, also firmly wedded to the "Lib-Lab" approach, supported Belcher, and though they found themselves more and more isolated from the rank and file on these increasingly important issues, their personal prestige continued to be much too great for anyone to challenge their leadership.

Young had a different attitude to these problems from that of his Dunedin and Auckland colleagues, and the differences grew wider with the years, though they were not to become completely apparent until the new wave of militancy broke in the big industrial upheavals of 1912 and 1913. At that stage, the members of the Seamen's Union were to show in action that Young was their real leader, and not Belcher or Kneen.

Born in Wellington in 1870, Young was a different type of man from all the seamen's leaders who had preceded him. To start with, he was a New Zealander, and they for the most part had been born and brought up on the other side of the world. Although he had worked for his living since he was 11 years old, Young had had a fair grounding in education, which had been made free and compulsory in New Zealand while he was a child. His formative years had coincided with the ferment of ideas among the New Zealand workers in the late 80s and early 90s, when Belcher was already a mature man. Young read voraciously, and (like many of his generation) was particularly influenced by the writings of Henry George — which provided him with a radical commitment well to the left of the Liberals, and a framework of ideas which made him see industrial struggles as tactical means not only for improving the lot of the workers under the "wage-system", but for liberating them from the "wage-system" altogether.

Belcher, too, was a reader, but his tastes were for literature rather than polemic, and he studied reports and statistics for

the purpose of helping seamen to gain some immediate advantage, not (as Young did) for the purpose of educating the workers in the facts of their exploitation and with a view to the ultimate overthrow of the exploiters.

In the early 1900s, in short, Tom Young (though a pious Roman Catholic) was in tune with the militant feelings of the members, and still receptive to new ideas; whereas the older generation of leaders had their ideas and loyalties fixed, and, being older and wearier men, were more resistant to the pressures of rank and file opinion.

The ferment of radical ideas which had died out in the middle 90s did not remain dormant for long. By the early 1900s it had burst into new life — but this time it was definitely outside, not within, the pale of the ruling Liberal Party.

In mid-1902, the Union issued a circular to members commending to their attention a brand-new “*real live Labour journal . . . entirely independent of capital*” — a claim which significantly echoed the abortive journal of the Maritime Council. Called *The Pilot*, the new journal was published in Auckland and was intended to appear monthly — though there is no evidence that it survived to a second issue. An annual sub was to be 3s 6d, but the Union Executive, which had agreed to be one of the journal’s official sponsors, bought up enough copies of the first issue “for free distribution to all vessels”.

Originated and edited by members of the newly formed Socialist Party, *The Pilot* aimed to appeal to a much wider circle than committed socialists. It sub-titled itself “The Reform Journal of New Zealand”, and included material on single tax, housing, educational reform, and licensing, as well as notes from the National Council of Women and a number of trade unions.

The Seamen’s Union notes described recent activities of the Union and the flourishing condition of its branches. Describing Bill Belcher as “a man of strong physique, brimful of energy . . . a first class leader and organiser”, the article made the accurate enough claim that “to the Seamen’s Union, the workers of New Zealand practically owe the whole of their progressive legislation”. It went on to detail the enormous amount of work the Union still had to do, especially in relation to working and accommodation conditions aboard New Zealand ships, and ended with a barbed reference to Premier Seddon and the tame judge of his Arbitration Court:

"What a pity Dick of Kumara, or Judge Cooper, were not condemned to six months camping in some of the fo'csles of some of the boats trading on our coasts. A turn at the work of an AB might be pinprick enough to make these gentlemen stir up the shipping companies."

The disrespectful tone towards the Liberal establishment, linked with the Arbitration system, was a sign of the times. A year earlier, Young had written to Belcher concerning the inordinate delay in the fixing of a hearing on the Union's new award, and suggested that it was time the Arbitration Court had a full-time judge instead of one that had to do part-time duty on other tribunals, but Seddon seemed more concerned about the South African War and the preparations for Edward VII's coronation: *"The Exchequer will surely stand the strain of another £1500 per annum,"* wrote Young, *"especially in view of the fact of so much money being lavished here and there in connection with imperialistic debauchery."*

By mid-1901, the Union's three branches were accumulating ideas from members for the formulation of demands in connection with the new industrial agreement to be negotiated the following year. It was considered urgent to have the claim lodged in plenty of time because of the enormous backlog of work awaiting the attention of the Arbitration Court, which had not sat in Wellington for ten months — "a disgrace, in the face of all things!" as Young remarked. A conference of the three branches met in Wellington to draw up the claim, which included £7 for ABs and trimmers, £9 for firemen and greasers, and £1 extra for 6-hour watches; and overtime at 1s 6d an hour to be paid for all work in port between 5 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Some difficulty was experienced with "new" members in Auckland, who thought the demands "excessive" and requisitioned a further meeting to have them reconsidered. The northern branch was brought into line only after a special national Council meeting held to determine the tactics of the three separate hearings on the claim before the local Conciliation Boards, when the solidarity of the southern branches easily convinced the Auckland delegates that their branch's "realism" was actually pessimism.

Writing to Frisco while the Union was awaiting the commencement of hearings, Young commented:

"In regard to the working of the Conciliation Act, I find that while in some instances wages have been increased and general working conditions bettered, the Act itself will not solve the Labour Problem in this country. . . When increases have been conceded to the men, the employers increase the price of the necessities of life."

An attempt about this time by Jones and his "contemptible crowd of misled renegades" in Wellington to expand their operations by founding a branch in Lyttelton was squashed by the refusal of the Arbitration Court to accept its registration in response to representations from the Federated Seamen's Union. Jones' manoeuvre was frustrated, but it was based on a real need felt by seamen resident or ashore in Lyttelton for an organising and social centre. One of the four biggest ports in the country, Lyttelton was the only one without a branch of the FSU. This seemed like an anomaly to some Lyttelton members, who had no opportunity for participation in Union activity or decision-making unless they were away from home; but Young suggested a sensible compromise. His proposal was simply to set up an office or "agency" there, since vessels calling at Lyttelton almost invariably went on to Dunedin or Wellington and it would be uneconomically costly to register another full-scale branch. This suggestion, which was adopted, has proved of lasting merit; the office and monthly meetings at Lyttelton are still a valuable element in the Union's national organisation.

The idea was not entirely new. The secretary of the Watersiders' Union in Lyttelton had held the "agency" of the Seamen's Union in that port in the late 1880s, with responsibility for helping local members of the Seamen's Union in any day-to-day problems; and agents had been similarly appointed for longer or shorter periods in other ports, including Grey-mouth and Napier. But the establishment of a full-time agent in Lyttelton, with responsibility for convening meetings of members in the same way as in ports with Union branches, was attributable to the foresight of Tom Young in 1901, and it is one which has made a permanent contribution to the effective democracy of the Union.

Safety at sea was (as it still is) a continuing cause of concern to the Union. The number of ships wrecked and sunk around the New Zealand coast with loss of life has been high compared with other maritime nations, and this was one of the factors which gave our seamen an early feeling of solidarity

with the miners, the shore workers with the highest accident rate, toiling in the constant presence of hazards similar to their own. Prevention of disasters at sea by a more rigorous policing of regulations governing the seaworthiness of vessels became a public issue in the earliest years of this century as a result of a single-minded campaign initiated by Young in Wellington and taken up by the Union in other ports.

Young's first exposure of the "rust-buckets" in which sailors were expected to entrust their lives concerned the S.S. *Haupiri*, whose hullplates were actually punctured in the course of painting by being tapped with the handle of a paint-brush! The Marine Department nevertheless needed some prodding to require the complete overhaul of the vessel before she was allowed to put to sea again.

Millar's continued interest in his old Union was indicated by his election by the Auckland branch as one of its delegates to the national Council meeting before the Union's 1901 wage claim was heard. Auckland's choice of Millar seems to have been motivated by the assumption that, being a politician in the Government's confidence, he would favour the Auckland branch's more cautious approach to righting the wrongs of 1890; and that, because of his enormous prestige in the Union, he would be able to counterbalance the militancy of the southern branches. In the event, Millar was as cautious as was expected, but the determination of the Dunedin and Wellington delegates (backed by branch meetings which had unanimously approved the whole log of "excessive" demands) put fresh heart into Auckland, and the three applications went ahead on identical terms.

Millar's initial attitude on the question, and his association with the "weak sisters" in the north, did little to renew the Union's faith in the Liberal Party. In October 1901, during a Parliamentary debate on some much-discussed amendments to the I.C. and A. Act, Seddon deepened the distrust by some slighting references to the Seamen's Union and its current activities, and the following month Young declared in a letter to the Seamen's Union in Adelaide: "*Seddon . . . seems to have lost all progressive ideas, and when a good strong progressive man comes along Seddon will go down.*"

The three applications on the uniform claim were treated very differently in the three centres. In Dunedin, the application was heard by the local Conciliation Board, and rejected on the grounds (extensively argued by the U.S.S.Co.) of the cur-

rent slump in trade with Australia due to tariff policies. In Wellington, also, the Conciliation Board heard the application, but the argument on the employers' side was less convincing and the Board recommended a wage rise of 10s a month, an increase in the overtime rate to 1s 6d an hour, and an unconditional preference for Unionists. In Auckland, the employers (led by the Northern Co.) declined conciliation, and insisted on the matter going straight to the Arbitration Court.

Fearful of exposing the inexperienced Kneen (with a rather timid membership behind him) to the formidable opposition of the Northern Co. on his own, the Union sent Young to Auckland to help him as advocate, and a further Council meeting decided that, to overcome this problem permanently and for the general benefit of the members, the Auckland hearing should be based on a general application for a single Award covering the whole country. In this way it was considered that any weakness evident in Auckland could be balanced by the strength in other centres, and the favourable recommendations already obtained by the Conciliation Board in Wellington. This was not, however, the way it turned out in practice.

All eyes were on Auckland when the hearing opened early in 1902; but the broadening of the application into one for a national award greatly complicated the proceedings. After hearing the Union case and that of the Auckland employers in reply, as well as evidence from Auckland witnesses, the Court adjourned and continued hearings in both Wellington and Dunedin. The Court's decision, issued in mid-1902, granted three separate Awards as before, but in almost identical terms. The form of application may well have helped boost the result for the Auckland seamen, but if so it was clearly at the expense of those in Wellington, and caused some severe heart-burnings. The extra 10s a month and the restoration of the old overtime rate of 1s 6d an hour, specifically recommended by the Wellington Conciliation Board, were rejected. There was no blanket preference for Unionists. However, the Award did contain eleven separate instances of improvement on existing conditions.

Wellington members, though disappointed to find the hopeful outcome of conciliation aborted, expressed satisfaction at the fact that all New Zealand seamen were now working under virtually identical conditions. In any case, a number of local shipowners immediately entered into separate agreements grant-

ing 10s to 30s a month above the Award rate, and this was seen as a hopeful opening for a general improvement.

The year 1902 saw other developments of importance to the Union. The Union's Wellington office, situated at 17 Willis Street ever since Tom Young was established as secretary in 1898, was shifted to new premises in Queen's Chambers, Post Office Square, where it was to remain until a fire, just after World War I, drove it to seek another new home at 157 Featherston Street.

The same year, one of Britain's best known militant Unionists, Tom Mann, arrived in New Zealand on a speaking tour, and was persuaded to stay for some months and help reorganise some of the unions shattered in the Maritime struggle of 1890. Although regarded with considerable suspicion by some of the Seamen's Union's Liberal officials, Mann's personality and organising genius made a big impression on members of the rank and file who heard him speak or saw the fruits of his work. His assistance in re-activating unionism among New Zealand's watersiders greatly enhanced his reputation, and his outspoken views on socialism, on the need for an independent labour political organisation separate from the reigning Liberals, on the dangers of compulsory arbitration, and on the importance of contacts with the labour movements of other countries, were listened to with tremendous respect.

This man was, after all, the best known of the little handful of men who had led and spoken up for the cause of the London dockers in their great struggle in 1889, to which New Zealand workers had contributed such substantial sums, and from which they had derived such inspiration in their own struggles the following year. His words fell like seeds on fertile ground, though the harvest was some years in coming.

A fresh attempt at disruption in Wellington was heavily rebuffed in the same year. Public notices announced the formation of a separate union for ships' firemen, and the suggestion was put about that "large numbers of members of the Wellington Branch of the Seamen's Union" were defecting in order to join it, in recognition of the fact that firemen had "distinct interests" from those of other seamen. The boast proved to be groundless, though the Union took it seriously enough to issue a printed circular headed: "*BEWARE!*" The only support the new organisation had was from those firemen who belonged to the dwindling forces of the "Jones Union", and it became apparent that the whole affair was merely an

attempt by Jones to find a new and slightly less sullied basis for his old organisation. Once the connection between the new body and Jones had been publicly exposed, it rapidly disappeared. The membership of Jones's union had already by this time been surpassed by the bona fide Wellington Branch of the Federation, and the fact that the former had definitely had its day was soon made manifest by the resignations of Hindmarsh and Hutcheson from all office within it. Both skilful politicians, interested in the future of working class politics, these two gentlemen had no desire to be handicapped by association with a limb of the labour movement which had not only been sawn off from the main tree, but had even lost the confidence of those it claimed to represent.

1903 saw a brief but bitter dispute with the U.S.S.Co. on the interpretation of one of the new clauses in the previous year's Award. This provided that one member of the crew of each ship should be allowed sufficient time daily "out of working hours" to keep the crew's living quarters clean and sanitary. The Company insisted that the words "out of working hours": meant "outside working hours": the Union understandably claimed that if this was what they meant, then there was no need to have included the clause in the Award at all as it would not have any reference whatever to relations between the employer and his employees, and that the words were clearly intended to mean "subtracted from" or "during working hours".

The Union instructed members not to clean living quarters at all except where time was granted during ship's working hours, pending an Arbitration Court decision on the matter. The Court's decision came down firmly on the Union's side, and a Company move to have the Union penalised for having "pre-judged" the issue by instructing its members to abide by its own interpretation of the clause before the decision had been given, was also unsuccessful.

The Court's decisions were not, however, always so favourable to the Union — nor were they even noticeably consistent. Two similar disputes on non-payment of overtime during 1903 resulted in disparate decisions of the Court. On the *Corinna*, a deck-hand had been required to keep "anchor watches" between 5 p.m. and 7 a.m. while the ship was moored to a buoy in Timaru Harbour. The Union contended that, since the ship was in fact in port, overtime rates were payable, but the Court held that mooring to a buoy did not technically constitute being

“in port”, so the deckhand was done out of his overtime. On the *Hawea*, on the other hand, the watching of a freight of live sheep between 5 a.m. and 6 p.m. while at sea was argued by the employers to be “necessary for the safety of the ship” and therefore not subject to overtime pay, but the Court held that the terms “safety or navigation” had to be read together, and that since there was no evidence that the watching had been necessary for the ship’s safety in this sense, overtime rates had to be paid.

The big noise of 1903 concerned a fireman named Richmond on the S.S. *Canopus*. Brought out to New Zealand under U.K. articles to make up a full crew, Richmond had been promised 12 months’ work on the New Zealand coast, and had joined the Union as soon as the ship reached this country, signing on his first New Zealand job at Westport in July 1903. On his return to the same port he was taken ill, and was discovered by a Westport doctor to be suffering from malaria and ordered to be removed to hospital in defiance of the instructions of the captain. If he had remained on board, the doctor testified that he would probably have died. As it turned out, he was off work for 6 weeks, but when he claimed compensation from the company he was told he had no claim. The Minister of Marine declined a request from the Union to take action against the owners for full wages plus medical expenses, so the Union instituted proceedings itself, and the Magistrate awarded the full amount plus costs against the company.

The case not only established an important point of principle, but raised many important political queries among the members of the Union. Why had the Liberal Minister of Marine refused to take official action on a case in which the principles were so clear? If the Liberal Government was not prepared to support the Union, why should the Union go on supporting the Liberal Government? The feeling of disenchantment kept growing, and the record of the Arbitration Court, a body originally set up by the Liberal Government for the professed purpose of “ensuring justice for the workers”, did nothing to turn the tide of opinion.

During 1905, the Union loaned £50 to the Otago Trades Council, the stronghold of “Lib-Lab” politics in the trade union movement, to establish its official journal *The Otago Liberal* but it made clear that it did so in order to help guarantee the trade unions a printed mouthpiece, and not because

of any uncritical support for the Liberal Party. The chances of such uncritical support were, in any case, greatly reduced after the sudden death in 1906 of the giant personality of Premier Seddon, the magic of whose charm and bluster had kept alive the faith of many a radical in the good intentions of the Liberals.

The Arbitration Court hearings on another award in 1905 seemed to go well enough for the Union. The case put up by the employers in opposition to claims for improvements was certainly vigorous, but it was entirely unsupported by evidence. The employers claimed (without producing any figures to bear out the claim) that if they met certain of the Union's demands, there would have to be "balancing concessions" from the Union to enable shipowners to continue economically in business. In particular, they asked for the total abolition of overtime payments and the deduction of wages for proven misconduct if there was any increase in the basic wage rate.

Although these claims of the employers' were treated with ridicule before the Court, the Court majority's decision, issued in January 1906, proved to be no laughing matter. None of the Union's claims for improvements was met, no increase in the wage rate was granted — but the "concessions" demanded by the employers were all incorporated into the new Award regardless! As from 1st April 1906, there was to be no regulation of the number of hours worked per day by seamen, no provision for the conditions or manner of overtime payments (although an "overtime rate" was mentioned), and shipowners were given the right to deduct amounts from wages for misconduct on the say-so of the ship's master!

In an indignant circular printed with a heavy black border, the Union declared that the Arbitration Court had become "*simply a factotum to register the wills and decrees of the employers. . . We have put the Award in mourning. . . In it, the employers' rights are clear and concise, but the workers' rights are shrouded in ambiguity. . . It is appropriate that it should come into operation on All Fools' Day*".

The hopes of the Union in the Liberal Government may have been briefly revived when, in the re-shuffle following Seddon's death, J. A. Millar was called to the front bench and given the Ministries of Labour and Marine, but these hopes were heavily overshadowed by the adverse decision of the Arbitration Court. Evidently through Millar's influence,

Belcher was appointed as Government nominee on the Otago Harbour Board a few months later, but the appointment did little to recapture the confidence of the Union as a whole in the Government or its works. The opposition of the Tories and their press to Belcher's appointment may momentarily have closed the widening breach, but the fact was made fairly evident that the Government was bestowing a personal honour on an old stalwart rather than a general one on the Seamen's Union. When the Dunedin *Evening Star* declared its alarm at the Government inflicting such a notorious agitator onto the local port controlling authority, Belcher made his reply in a letter to the editor in very personal (and characteristically forthright) terms: "You'll get a Roland for your Oliver any time you attempt to scarify me the same as you done to others".

As a member of the Board, Bill Belcher did sterling service to the cause of Dunedin workers, but increasingly he played the political game according to the rules laid down by the Government that had appointed him . . . until, finally, the break had to come.

Meanwhile, as a functionary of the Union, Belcher was quite prepared to express the militant resentment of the seamen against the brand of justice administered by the Arbitration Court. The Union Council, meeting in August 1906, was divided as to the kind of protest that should be made against the Court. It was starkly apparent that its decision had been made against the weight of evidence, and there was a move among the less militant of the Union's councillors to restrict the campaign to a political approach to the Government for the amendment of the I.C. and A. Act so as to make it mandatory for all decisions of the Court to conform to the evidence adduced "as with any other Court of law". But this line was seen as implying too much faith in the process of arbitration and over-much confidence in the lobbying of Government Ministers: the majority had become thoroughly disillusioned with both. Instead, the Council resolved to wage a campaign of publicity on the "gross injustice" of the decisions embodied in the latest Award, and leave the Union's hands free to take whatever action might be expedient. A further resolution decided that the Union should give the Court another 12 months' trial, after which a ballot of members should determine whether or not the Union should cancel its registration under the Arbitration Act on the grounds that "*long experience of the Arbitra-*

tion Court had proved that institution to be of little or no benefit to seamen".

A deputation from the Council to the new Minister of Labour and Marine (the Union's own ex-General Secretary) did not discuss this central issue. After congratulating Millar on his Cabinet status, the Councillors told him that the Union "assumed that he would endeavour, so far as his position would allow him, to advance the interests of the seafaring community". Then they went on to outline the Union's views on various matters such as the inadequacy of the current manning scale, the need for an amendment to the labour laws giving general preference of employment to unionists, and the importance of improving the standard of shipboard accommodation, especially the provision of separate sleeping and eating quarters and the upgrading of the "quantity and quality of food".

Millar was affable and placatory. He was "strongly in agreement" with the Union; he would "attempt" to persuade Cabinet; he would "do his utmost to effect some reform in this direction".

The interview was used to publicise the justice of some of the claims made by the Union which the Arbitration Court had summarily rejected. That this was apparently the sole serious purpose of the interview seems never to have occurred to the earnestly reassuring Minister, confident that he could tame the militancy of the men he used to lead. Neither does it seem to have occurred to him that the Union might be preparing other means of redress apart from whispering in the Minister's ear.

The Councillors all knew just how angry the rank and file were. They knew that the whole Union was at the ready to take any action on a word from their elected leaders. The height of the export season was approaching. An unusual number of ships was scheduled to be in the main ports, loading or unloading for reshipment on overseas vessels, around Christmas time, and all the main colliers bringing their lifeblood, coal, from the West Coast were due to arrive at the main ports within a crucial period of two days. Identical letters of 18 December 1906 from Belcher to Young in Wellington and Kneen in Auckland made preparations for the "*possibilities which might happen at the end of the month*". Belcher commented that "a gradual withdrawal of crews under the

provisions of the Shipping Act will be much more effective and will certainly place us in a better legal position than proclaiming a general strike". He also enclosed a "telegraphic code" for use between the Union leaders in the three centres "in emergency".

The branches in the other centres stood by, waiting for the word from Head Office in Dunedin. But somehow the scheduled congregation of ships in port did not eventuate. Arrivals were unexpectedly and inexplicably delayed, and sailing times were advanced. "The whole question of doing anything at that time will have to be abandoned," wrote Belcher to the two northern leaders on 21 December. The possibility of action had been, he was sure, "*frustrated by design. . . I have it on unimpeachable authority that Jimmy Mills had the full strength of the men's intentions.*"

Who had betrayed the sacred confidence and enabled the employers to prevent the possibility of a very successful lighting stoppage is one of those minor historical mysteries which will remain forever unsolved. Suffice it to say that Belcher's own personal friendship with Millar began to be regarded with growing suspicion by the militants in the Union, and that a decline in the members' confidence in Belcher's leadership, which reached a crisis only ten years later, appears to have its origins in the "*Christmas strike that never happened*" in 1906.

Early in January 1907 came the announcement that a Colonial Merchant Shipping Conference was to be opened in London at the end of March to discuss a wide range of topics associated with mercantile and transport policy between Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, and that the Ward Government was considering the appointment of a "representative delegation" of persons interested in such matters to attend it at Government expense. A telegram from Belcher to Millar dated 8 January enquired whether there was "any likelihood" of Belcher being "amongst the selected". Next day, Belcher received a telegram from Premier Ward asking him to accept appointment as one of New Zealand's delegates to the conference, along with the Premier himself, Mills of the U.S.S.Co., and the secretary of the Marine Engineers Association (a body nominally representative of employee interests, but with a very bad industrial record from 1890). Within days, Belcher had received an advance on his travelling expenses, and obtained comfortable bookings for himself, wife, and daughter to Lon-

don via the United States — although he had assured Ward that he was “at home in any part of the vessel”.

It was a dazzling occasion for an old sea dog like Belcher. Presided over by the British President of the Board of Trade (and subsequently Prime Minister) Lloyd George, it was attended by representatives of Governments, shipowners, and maritime unions in the countries concerned. The Union representatives from both the other countries were also Members of Parliament, and appeared to carry a political as well as an industrial brief: Havelock Wilson, M.P., General President of the British National Seamen's and Firemen's Union, and W. M. Hughes, M.P., President of the Australian Waterside Workers' Federation.

The path which both Wilson and Hughes were later to tread (Hughes as the leader of the Australian anti-Labour Government which tried to impose conscription during the First World War, Wilson as the most infamous scabherder of the British General Strike of 1926) was already taking shape. Early in the conference, Belcher raised a number of awkward questions such as the possible abolition of imprisonment for desertion, and the application of (superior) colonial conditions to the crews of all ships trading with the colonies; but as the proceedings went on, he quietened down noticeably. Years later, in a letter to Havelock Wilson, Belcher expressed nostalgia for “copious draughts of the nectar which is only obtained at the ‘first club in Europe’”. According to his own account, he returned to New Zealand “stoney broke”, and it is on record that he complained to Millar of the inadequacy of the entertainment allowance of £500 granted him by the Government.

The London Conference, which lasted four weeks, was inconclusive. In any case, its resolutions were not binding on the three governments represented, but the hands of the unions in all three countries were morally strengthened by unanimous resolutions of the conference in favour of the general application of Australian and New Zealand manning, survey, and accommodation conditions to all ships trading between the three countries, and uniform legislation on workers' compensation. Other matters of more moment to the unions, initially raised by Belcher, were among the impressive list of topics on which the Conference Report recorded that “delegates differed”.

One of the resolutions moved by Belcher which received

the support of the conference opposed the employment of "Lascars, coolies, and Chinamen or persons of any other alien race" on vessels operating on the Britain-Australia-New Zealand run. The terms of the resolution are interesting. The problem posed by the use of Asian crews in undercutting Award wages in Australia and New Zealand, and in reducing employment opportunities, had long been recognised. The traditional union approach in New Zealand had been that expressed by Sir George Grey back in 1880, that we should not allow workers accustomed to lower standards of living to "drag the European labouring population down", but rather "*establish in these islands a population which might ultimately bless, by their example and influence, every one of the neighbouring semi-barbarous nations*". This approach had been remarkably free from the open race prejudice of Belcher's resolution.

It has to be recalled that Hughes, the Australian delegate with whom Belcher came into closest contact at the conference, was committed to the "White Australia" policy, and this undoubtedly influenced the wording of the resolution — though it certainly doesn't excuse it. Less excusable still is the increasingly racist tone of the statements issued by Belcher in the name of the Union on this same question during the years following his return from the London Conference. More and more, they tended to direct the resentment of the Union against the race and colour of the men who were being used to break down their conditions, instead of against the unscrupulous employers who were using them. In the long run, the internationalism of Tom Mann, with its frank recognition of the brotherhood of all workers, won out among New Zealand seamen over the diversionary racism of Billy Hughes: but between 1907 and 1913, the Union's name was put to some very dubious policies in the perfectly legitimate defence of members' jobs and conditions.

To the credit of the members, they began to see from an early stage that these policies actually helped the employers, not only by diverting the Union's attention from the struggle with the employers which was necessary to ensure better wages and conditions, but by detracting from the principles of human dignity and equality without which the goals of unionism were empty and meaningless.

The growing disaffection among the organised workers towards the Liberals and industrial arbitration came to a head in the years that followed. In 1908, Ward declared a "legislative

holiday", in the conviction that the continued erosion of Liberal support among the farmers and the town middle-class by Massey's Tory Opposition might be halted by getting rid of the radical image that still hung over the Liberal Party from the early days of Ballance and Seddon. Strikes in defiance of the Arbitration Court started as early as 1905, but the strikes of the Petone slaughtermen in 1907 and the Blackball miners in 1908 marked the real turning-point in the basic attitude of the New Zealand workers towards the fabric of "legal Unionism". Millar's role as Minister of Labour, issuing orders to strikers to return to work under pain of legal penalties, subjected him to bitter accusations of being a "turncoat" and a "Judas". He was freely compared with John Burns, one of the London Dockers' leaders of 1889, who had similarly forsaken trade union militancy to accept Cabinet office in a Liberal Government.

The appropriate path for the labour movement, extracting itself from the longstanding misalliance with Liberalism, was not immediately clear. Two alternatives offered themselves, and the division between the advocates of these two alternatives became deep and acrimonious, and plagued the unity and effectiveness of the movement for many years to come.

Since 1905, the Trades and Labour Councils had been backing an Independent Political Labour League, whose Parliamentary candidates were pledged to support the Liberal Party on issues of confidence, but also to battle for the League's own independent programme. The larger industrial unions, however, and conspicuously the miners, were impatient of all political mechanisms as a means of improving the conditions of the workers, and looked solely to industrial action. If they had a political vision, it was the Marxian socialism espoused by the Socialist Party formed in the early 1900s, which had strong branches in mining areas. But they were also strongly influenced by the pure "syndicalism" (or commitment to altering society by militant trade union action) of the Industrial Workers of the World. This organisation, (known as the I.W.W., or "Wobblies"), was familiar to many New Zealand seamen who had worked on the Pacific coast of the United States, and many "Wobbly" publications, including Joe Hill's "Little Red Songbooks", were brought into the country in those years to encourage the growth of militancy among New Zealand workers.

In the years 1907-08, New Zealand was visited by two dis-

tinguished figures from the British Labour movement who had a remarkable influence on the development of these two distinct lines of thinking in our own labour movement. Keir Hardie, the first independent Labour member of the House of Commons, toured the country speaking everywhere of the need for a separate Labour Party in our Parliament. On the other hand, Ben Tillett, another of the leaders of the London Dock Strike of 1889, spoke everywhere of the need for industrial organisation and action. Both Hardie and Tillett spoke in general terms of "socialism" as the ultimate destiny of Labour, but Tillett's gospel, like that of his friend Tom Mann before him, tended to have a warmer and more immediate ring. The committed socialists (who had been leading lights behind the short-term *Pilot* magazine venture in 1902) saw the industrial militancy of Tillett as the most likely means of achieving their goal. The old "Lib-Labs" merely adopted the term "socialism" as the long-term target of an independent Labour political organisation which aimed primarily at promoting the sort of reforms which had kept them loyal to the Liberals in the 1890s, and the terms "Extreme Labour" or "Red", as opposed to "Sane Labour", came into currency in New Zealand.

By 1908, the move to form an independent Labour Party was well under way, though the Trades Councils did not actually set up such a body until their conference in 1910. At the same time, the N.Z. Federation of Miners, (led by Bob Semple, Pat Hickey, Tim Armstrong, and Bill Parry among others) amalgamated with other militant industrial unions to form the N.Z. Federation of Labour, soon to be popularly known as the "Red Fed" and its adherents as "red-feds". Following very closely the pattern and ideas of the I.W.W., of which Pat Hickey had been a member during a long sojourn in the United States, the new "Red Fed" proclaimed the class struggle as the means by which the workers of the world must "take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage-system".

Even the former, more moderate, path was too militant for those heavily committed to support the Liberal Party right or wrong. After the decision of the Seamen's Union Council in 1908 to support the formation of an independent Labour Party, Belcher wrote a letter labelled "STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL" to his old friend Hon. J. A. Millar. In it, he described the debate which preceded the decision. He made it clear that the decision had been taken despite the well-argued

opposition of both himself and Kneen, and how his own feeling of political isolation in the Union had increased further with his unsuccessful attempts to dissuade members in Dunedin from "fraternising with Hardie" during the distinguished visitor's stay in that city.

"The Council having decided on a certain course, I have either to be in or out," wrote Belcher. "Now I can't afford to throw up what I have until some other avenue of income presents itself. . . My only alternative is to look to the Government." He went on, with disarming straightforwardness, to request Millar to use his influence to have him appointed to the Upper House!

How hard Millar bent his efforts in this particular direction may never be known, but they were certainly unsuccessful. Instead, Belcher was re-appointed to the Otago Harbour Board (on which his term had just expired). Writing to thank Millar for this consolation prize, Belcher described to him the "hostile feelings" expressed towards the person of the Minister of Labour by a Dunedin trade union audience a few days before after listening to Miners' Union delegates speaking on the Blackball dispute. After a few years as Minister of Labour, Millar could find very few trade unionists who would admit to being his friends, or would give him confidential advice about anything. As he became steadily identified with the new right-wing image of the Liberal Party, and with its arbitration system to which "penal provisions" had been added to "deal with strikes", Millar became completely isolated from the trade union movement and the Seamen's Union which had been his first stepping-stones to political power.

The Belcher-Millar channel of communication remained open during the period which followed, but Belcher's personal loyalty to the Liberals cooled noticeably after their failure to provide him with the "other avenue of income" for which he was seeking. Dependent on the Union for his livelihood, he conformed, outwardly at least, to the Union's new political line. To him, as to other erstwhile "Lib-Labs", it was some comfort that at least the Union was not committed to the new "Red Fed" policy espoused by the miners — reminiscent as that policy was of their own activities before and during the Maritime Strike less than twenty years before! The Liberal Party, quite determined not to let its new focus on the support of the "respectable" classes of the community be tarnished by appearing to continue paying court to the trade unions by

appointing old unionists to the Legislative Council or anything else, literally drove its supporters among the union movement into the camp of Independent Labour. But being at heart Liberals, and not socialists, these people naturally converged on the more "moderate" wing of the Labour movement, and greatly strengthened the resistance of the Trades Councils' Labour Party to any real moves towards unity with the "Red Feds".

Looking for a new organ to publicise the views of the Union became a simple matter in 1909, when the Wellington Trades Council launched *The Weekly Herald*. The Seamen's Union gave the new journal financial backing, and contributed a regular column of "Seafaring Notes" on Union activities over the signature "Neptune", which carried the unmistakable stamp of Tom Young's penmanship.

In his first instalment, "Neptune" concentrated on the question of safety at sea, describing the ships which regularly "leave Wellington and other New Zealand ports with leaky boats or without sufficient life-saving appliances". The question had just been forced to the forefront of the public mind by the disastrous wreck of the passenger steamer *Penguin* on the coast outside Wellington Harbour in February 1909, with the loss of 75 lives, including most of the crew and a large number of passengers, many of them women and children. "Neptune" felt able to claim that the Seamen's Union had "the universal support of the people" in ensuring that in future measures were enforced so as "to prevent another *Penguin* disaster on our coast".

The Weekly Herald's political line was uncompromisingly for the new independent Labour Party, and was greatly enhanced by the front page cartoons of a young and then unknown Christchurch lad called David Low.

Despite the Union's backing of the *Herald*, an increasing number of seamen took to reading the rival journal, *The Maori-land Worker*, founded by the Shearers' Union in 1910 and taken over the following year by the N.Z. Federation of Labour. The *Worker* also had its popular cartoonist, R. F. Way, who had drawn cartoons for (and helped to edit) the short-lived *Pilot* which the Union had backed earlier. It took the much more militant stand of the "Red Feds" on political and industrial matters, and its vigorous journalism had much greater appeal to the men who had been impressed by the propaganda of the American Wobblies on the Pacific coast,

and the oratory of Tom Mann and Ben Tillett — not to mention those who remembered the oratory of John Millar and Bill Belcher in their militant days — than the more subdued tone of the *Herald*. From an early stage, the *Worker* sold far more copies than the membership of unions affiliated to the “Red Fed” would seem to justify, and its influence extended far into the ranks of the officially much more moderate sections of the labour movement. It wasn’t long before the competition was too much for the *Herald*, and forced it out of business altogether, leaving the *Worker* as the sole voice of Labour in New Zealand.

The arrival of the U.S.S.Co.’s new trader *Apirama* in Wellington in May 1909 on her maiden voyage with an Asian crew was the occasion for further Union publicity on what became known as “the Lascar Question”. Young’s publicity in the *Herald* focussed on the economic aspects of the situation, contrasting the New Zealand Award’s £9 a month for firemen and greasers and £7 for ABs and trimmers with the “35 lovely round shillings” being paid to the Asian crews. “*There is nothing in the world to prevent the Union Company employing Lascars in the intercolonial and coastal trade,*” declared “Neptune” boldly, “*so long as they extend them the same terms and conditions as are granted to European seamen*”. Belcher’s line on the question, however, had a different tone.

The Seamen’s Union’s ambiguous attitude towards Millar was frequently reflected in the pages of the *Weekly Herald*. Commenting on a report from London concerning the apostasy of John Burns (with whom Millar was often compared) to the effect that “only a strong man could have shifted his base as Burns has done”, the *Herald* remarked: “which is equivalent to saying that *it takes a strong man to be a good rat!*” An editorial discoursing generally on Millar’s political career expressed particular bitterness about his 1908 amendment to the I.C. and A. Act which made striking without 14 days’ notice “a crime punishable with imprisonment”. Following a dispute over the Seamen’s Union’s access to crews aboard ships, in which Millar (as Minister of Marine) had taken the employers’ side, Tom Young reminded Millar in a *Herald* interview that he “owes his position in the political world mainly to the untiring efforts and influence of the Union which he now threatens to punish. This is indeed gratitude of the most sublime character.” By mid-1910, the Dunedin correspondent was saying that Millar

"since accession to office has gone back on so many of his former principles and opinions that one cannot realise that it is the same J. A. Millar, the hero of the great Maritime Strike".

No positive steps on safety precautions had followed the *Penguin* disaster of early 1909, before another New Zealand steamer, the *Duco*, foundered with all hands off the Chathams in September. The Government sent off a Marine Department ship to help the fruitless search for survivors, but as a Union spokesman commented sourly, "another search which the Marine Department should effect as early as possible is to find some drastic means of preventing the shameless overloading which took place in the case of the *Duco*." The Court of Inquiry held that the ship had left port "not in a condition to encounter such perils of the sea as she might fairly be expected to encounter" and that "the deck cargo she carried rendered her unseaworthy".

Young took the opportunity to draw attention to the similarity of the perils facing seamen with those facing another maligned section of grossly exploited workers, the miners. Seagoing was, he pointed out, "*a murderous occupation*", and the death rate among British seamen was 58.1 per 10,000 compared with 1.9 among factory operatives. A few months later he remarked on the £150 raised by the Seamen's Union in support of the Newcastle miners in New South Wales, currently on strike, and referred to the comradeship that had grown up between the miners and seamen on both sides of the Tasman in 1890. "So far," he commented, "the marine engineers are not reported to have given anything. Is it not reported in the dailies that they have always been on excellent terms with the shipowner? I believe they were during the Maritime Strike of 1890 — in fact they stayed in their jobs to please him".

The increasing number of references back to 1890 reflected no mood of aging reminiscence; it was a sign of resurgent militancy which looked back naturally to that year of inspiration and example.

The Seamen's Union, affiliated to the Trades Councils federation, followed the "moderate" line of that body, and became affiliated to the Labour Party which it set up in 1910. At the same time, however, the "Red Fed" began an evangelising mission for new affiliations, and the strains on the unity of the Seamen's Union, like many others, became acute. Large numbers of seamen flocked along with the thousands

who heard "Battling Bob" Semple and "Red Pat" Hickey appeal for the national organisation of the workers on a class basis, and the message often found a warmer echo in their hearts than the Parliamentary piecemeal programme of the new Labour Party found. It was pressure from the Seamen's Union, among others, which forced the Trades Councils and the Labour Party to convene their premature Unity Conference in 1912, in the hope (forlorn, for the moment at least) that the whole labour movement could be welded into a single coherent political and industrial force.

The Socialist Party and its leading personalities (such as Harry Holland and Peter Fraser) had close relations with the "Red Fed" from the beginning. Holland and Fraser were successive editors of the *Maoriland Worker*, and the Australian lecturer, Scott Bennett, who was on the payroll of the Socialist Party, was also employed by the "Red Fed" as an organiser from about 1910. The Labour Party tried to match the impact of this Australian by employing an American journalist called W. T. Mills, and the two campaigns came more and more into conflict as rival claimants for the loyalty of the New Zealand labour movement — notably in a public debate between Bennett and Mills in an Auckland theatre in 1911.

A *Weekly Herald* columnist who had initially deplored the "disintegrating" effect of the "red tie brigade" and its crusade, later came to the conclusion that the combined impact of the two campaigns being conducted simultaneously by the two divergent wings of the movement "must be good" because they both drew public attention to the working-class cause and "put Labour on the map".

Truly, the Labour movement was in ferment: but one thing was definite. Whichever way it was going, it had forsaken forever any intention of maintaining its old link as junior partner to the Liberals and upholders of the Liberals' system of compulsory arbitration. Like the rest of the movement, the Seamen's Union took some time to resolve upon the appropriate kind of political action it should espouse to further its industrial objectives: but it emphatically rejected the politics of some of the old stalwarts such as Millar and Belcher whose contribution towards building the Union had, beyond question, been tremendous beyond evaluation.

Like people themselves, human organisations grow and change and develop: and in the course of this process they

often part company from those who have nurtured and befriended them in earlier times.

The "old guard" in the Seamen's Union, as in many other organisations, fought a vigorous rearguard action, but it was covert rather than open. At the 1910 meeting of the Union's Council in Wellington, for instance, Belcher managed to maintain fairly effective control of proceedings and noticeably soft-pedalled on all issues in which the Union was at variance with the Government. The members were still as hostile to the Arbitration Court as they had been in 1906, but the punitive action taken against strikers in the following years has enabled Belcher and Kneen to persuade the Union to a policy of "wait and see" towards the whole arbitration issue. The dominant item on the agenda was "The Lascar Question", and a deputation of Councillors sent to interview Government M.P.s on "current matters of importance to the Union" appears to have mentioned little else. While Young spoke of it in terms of the coastal and intercolonial trade "almost entirely built up by New Zealand labour and enterprise" now facing the danger of being "destroyed by outsiders", Belcher talked only of defending "a White New Zealand" against "a Black Invasion". Young kept chipping in with thoughts such as that "Even if the Lascars were British subjects they should not be permitted to drag white subjects of the Empire down to their level. It should rather be the aim of white Britishers to raise the Lascars to their own level", and he evidently had some support for his more rational view of the issue. But the "old guard" consistently reduced it to a question of race.

Faced by these arguments, of course, the Parliamentarians (including Premier Ward) were able to express "sympathy" for the Union and then do nothing whatever about the matter. But the old approach was not destined to last much longer. Tides were making among the rank and file which were very shortly to sweep it into the limbo of forgotten things.

8.

THE RED FED AND THE SECOND GREAT STRIKE: 1912-1913

History moved fast in the next few years. The long reign of Liberalism ground to a halt, and Massey's Tories (officially called the "Reform Party") came to power, uninhibited by the least sentimental regard for the labour movement. Gloves were off and masks laid aside. Social forces which recognized their mutual enmity locked in naked class struggle, and the might of the State was thrown against the organised workers.

The fall of the Liberals had a double cause. Their radical programme of breaking up the big estates in the 90s and settling small farmers on the land under "perpetual leaseholds" had bred a new class of blindly self-seeking peasant farmers. These people only too readily forsook the Liberals (whose policy had created them) as soon as Massey whetted their land-hunger by raising the bogus catch-cry of the "freehold". To solidify the support of small farmers, the Reform Party incorporated much State assistance to agriculture in its programme, but its political complexion was unmistakably conservative. On the other hand, the traditional Liberal support among urban wage-earners had swung to the camp of independent Labour. The Liberals became a spent force, an effete buffer between the more extreme antagonists of right and left.

The 1911 elections had seen the Tories increase their representation in the House to 37, while the Liberals dwindled to 34 supported by 4 Labour members. Six Independents divided three each way. It was a stalemate, and the Liberal Government tottered on in power until the first session of the new Parliament should reveal which way the wind was going to blow.

To break the deadlock, it was necessary for at least one member to announce a "change of heart" and cross the floor of the House to the other side. Toryism, backed by wealth and privilege, had more plums to offer than its worn-out opponents. Not one, but five Liberals deserted the party to vote

Massey's Tories into office in 1912 — and among the five was none other than Hon. J. A. Millar!

If the unions had come to regard the Liberal Government as hostile to their aspirations, then they must have wondered what hit them when the Tory Government started expressing its feelings towards them. Massey had no time for the armoury of soft words and long drawn-out legal procedures by which his predecessors had held industrial militancy in check. His weapons were the baton and the gun.

The New Zealander who reads the history of Nazism in Germany or Fascism in Italy and comforts himself with the thought that "it couldn't happen here", has to do some painful re-thinking when he considers the events that took place in New Zealand in 1912 and 1913 — not to mention 1951!

The more far-seeing of the old "Lib-Lab" unionists in the Trades' Councils' Labour Party dreaded the direction which political events were taking, and saw the urgent need for a genuinely united labour movement to face the coming onslaught. The "Unity Conference" called by the Labour Party in 1912, was probably intended by its moving spirit, W. T. Mills, to persuade the "Red Fed" unions to join their tamer colleagues in a league of defence which would dilute their militancy while profiting from their strength in key industries: but it proved abortive because the "Red Fed" unions declined to attend. They believed that unity could be forged only on a basis of revolutionary socialism.

The conference united the federation of Trades and Labour Councils and their two-year-old Labour Party into a single body called the "United Labour Party" which aimed at being simultaneously a political and industrial organisation, but in fact it didn't achieve any real broadening of either of its participant groups. Real labour unity had to await the outcome of events yet to come.

In 1911, the miners' union at Waihi had followed the rest of the miners' unions in deregistering from the arbitration system and trying its hand at direct collective bargaining. In its first year of this kind of operation, the union won improvements estimated by the mine-owners to cost £30,000 a year. The owners' reply was to use the provisions of the Arbitration Act to start a scab union with 15 members, and to use the compliancy of this body to force down the wages and conditions of the 700 Waihi miners. The 700 struck in May 1912 against a clear breach of the agreement under which the

employers were bound to recognise only the *bona fide* union. For four months the strike was uneventful, until, a few months after Massey's takeover in Wellington, hundreds of "special constables" and scabs were rushed into Waihi — farmers' sons, released convicts, and small-town toughs. Picket-lines and processions of miners and their wives and children were charged by mounted men swinging batons and fingering revolvers. Unionists were constantly ambushed and beaten up. Those in more isolated parts of the little community were terrorised by night. The bloodiest moment came when a gang of specials and scabs, without a shred of legality or justification, bashed their way into the Union Hall, leaving one loyal unionist, Frederick George Evans, clubbed to death on the street outside.

Two days after the revolting murder of Evans, the Waihi miners were forced back to work — despite the £35,000 raised in their support by other unions throughout New Zealand and Australia (including many of the U.L.P.'s pro-arbitration unions). The moral of the tragic story of Waihi was only too clear to the militant leaders of the Red Fed who had helped organise the strikers and stumped New Zealand to gain them support — "*the hopelessness of effective, efficient, and successful unionism in New Zealand with the working class so fatuously divided, spiritless, misinformed, and unmanly*". The Red Fed itself called a conference of all organisations of the Labour movement to meet in Wellington in January 1913 to find "a basis of unity".

The Seamen's Union, which had raised money for the Waihi miners despite its official affiliation to the moderate U.L.P., was concerned at the same time with an internal reorganisation along lines just adopted by the Federated Seamen's Union in Australia. The 1912 meeting of the Union Council in Wellington approved the new constitution, with objects almost identical with those with which the Union had been founded 32 years earlier, the entrance fee reduced to 12s, dues increased to 25s a year, and the Council (elected on the basis of three members from each branch) empowered to "guard the interests of members" in the most general terms, with specific powers to "negotiate agreements between the employers and the Union" and "to take advantage of legislation in reference to industrial conciliation and arbitration."

The wording of this latter rule was significant. The Union had had enough experience of the I.C. and A. Act to know

what it thought of it, and had decided to deregister under its provisions in order to gain "freedom of action" of the sort so strongly advocated by the Red Fed. At the same time, it was decided to leave the Union elbow-room to get back and make use of the Act if it should ever prove advantageous to do so. Opinion in the Union, and even on the Council, was deeply divided on the question of a final break with the system.

One new rule which had particular relevance to the contemporary confusion of federated labour bodies forbade any branch of the Union to "affiliate to an outside organisation without the approval of Council". But even more important was the decision taken by the same Council meeting to shift the Union's Head Office from Dunedin to Wellington. This decision was carried only by the casting vote of the chairman (Dan Donovan, president of the Wellington Branch). The move (like the anti-Arbitration move) was vigorously opposed by Auckland delegates, but received the support not only of the whole Wellington delegation, but also of Belcher from Dunedin. This old "Lib-Lab" had never concealed his admiration for Tom Young — who had, after all, commenced his career in Union office as Belcher's protege in the fight against Jones. Belcher certainly didn't agree with Young's political views, but he recognised that these were far closer to the general consensus of the membership than his own views were, and he saw that Young had a far stronger claim to be considered the ideological leader of the seamen than a person with his own record of involvement in the politics of an age that had gone.

The main reasons Belcher put forward for the change were, nevertheless, restricted to two: the growth of the maritime industry in the north and consequent need to have the headquarters in the actual geographical centre of the country, and the tremendous new problems facing unionism as a whole which called for "a younger hand on the helm".

So Tom Young became the Union's General Secretary in 1912, and Dan Donovan became National President. Thus it was that the Seamen's Union delegation to the Unity conference called by the Red Fed in January 1913 was led by Young, and that Belcher, though present, took a very minor part in proceedings.

Young's role at the conference was a key one. In a speech on the opening morning, he deplored the fact that "there were now two labour factions in New Zealand" and applauded

ed "the fundamental idea of this conference . . . to bring these two factions together". He congratulated the Red Fed on having "come to the conclusion that the policy of the U.L.P. was absolutely right" — at which Semple interjected: "We have never made that admission". Young smiled and said: "I didn't wish to twit the gentlemen concerned, but in seeking a political machine it is evident that they agree to some extent with the policy of the U.L.P." However, he agreed that "the dead past should be dead. . . I have come here to help solidify the two parties, . . . *to heal the breach so that the whole working class can get together politically*".

It was Young who moved the crucial resolution that the conference should draft a provisional constitution for a federation of workers for industrial and political action, though this was later amended to envisage two separate bodies, one industrial and one political. Young emerged as one of the important figures bridging the differences between "moderate" and "extreme" wings, and at a rally at the Empress Theatre on the evening of the conference's final day, Young took the platform together with Tregear and Mills of the U.L.P., Semple of the Red Fed, and Holland of the Socialist Party. Tregear had been permanent head of the Labour Department from its establishment under the I.C. and A. Act and the Factories Act in the early 90s, and as a scholar with an international reputation, his attachment to the united labour cause had a tremendous impact. Semple and Holland, stirring orators with a background of militant union activity in Australia, were destined to play an important part in the rise of Labour to Parliamentary power in the years which followed.

"*The opposing factions have come together,*" proclaimed Young at the Empress Theatre that night. "The working class forces are solidified into one great organisation. . . The bitterest disappointments I have had in my life were caused by splits in the Labour ranks. Labour might be defeated at times, but on the morrow she rose again. The result of the Waihi strike was the most intellectual, the finest conference of Labour New Zealand had ever seen. . .

"If we can, through the medium of our members, create an industrial organisation of workers on one hand, and a political organisation on the other, we shall be able to sleep comfortably in the knowledge that *the present party of robbers now possessing the power of government in this country will not be there very long, but the working class will come*

into their rights by capturing control of the political machine”.

So, as in the 1890s, it seemed that industrial defeat had turned the attention of the labour movement towards a new, and this time more hopeful, form of political action. . . But the year 1913 held further lessons for the labour movement, including further industrial defeats.

The January conference, having outlined the “basis of unity”, resolved that a full-scale Unity Congress should be held six months later. On this occasion, the Seamen’s Union was represented by an 11-man delegation, three from each branch, plus Young and Belcher representing the National Council. Though some of the branch delegates (notably the whole delegation from Auckland) displayed extreme skepticism towards the entire proceedings and deep mistrust of their stated purpose, Young and Donovan, and to a lesser extent Belcher, played a conspicuous part in the debate and in assisting its very positive outcome.

By 296 to 50, the Congress resolved to set up two separate organisations — a United Federation of Labour incorporating both the old Trades Councils and the “Red Fed”; and a Social Democratic Party incorporating both the Labour Party and the Socialist Party. The U.F.O.L. adopted largely the constitution of the Red Fed, though its I.W.W.-based preamble was dropped (by 175 votes to 161). A clause endorsing the use of the strike weapon and binding all affiliates to follow a strike directive by the national executive was endorsed by 222 to 91, and affiliation fees were fixed at 1s per member per year.

As things turned out, the U.F.O.L. never became much broader than the old “Red Fed” — and in fact continued to be known by that name; but the intention to build a much more inclusive organisation, embracing all trends within the trade union movement, was sincerely present at the Congress which set it up, and it must be regarded as the lineal ancestor of the Federation of Labour which exists today. The reason why it never obtained the promised affiliation of the Trades Councils or developed smoothly into the mighty organ of class solidarity it was envisaged to be, was that history didn’t let it.

It was much the same with the political body which emerged from the Unity Congress. As a document, the Social Democratic Party’s constitution also lacked the revolutionary fervour of the old Socialist Party, but its platform was based on the Socialist Party’s much more than the U.L.P.’s, and the re-

spects in which it improved upon the U.L.P. platform ensured it an even wider popularity among non-socialist radicals despite its bold commitment to a socialist objective. It advocated a 34-hour week (as opposed to the modest 44-hour week sought by the U.L.P.), and its planks included such items as full political rights for women, civil rights for public servants, automatic adjustment of Awards to rises in the cost of living, and an international arbitration machinery which foreshadowed the League of Nations.

The small rump of the U.L.P., including one of its MPs and one big union (the A.S.R.S.) withdrew from the Congress determined to keep the U.L.P. going independent of the two new organisations, and there was some right wing reaction inside the Seamen's Union against the outcome of the Congress and the Union's part in it. Young, who had stood for Parliament under the banner of the old Trades' Councils' Labour Party in Wellington constituencies in 1908 and 1911, and been president of the Trades Councils' conferences on several occasions, came under angry right wing fire as a "renegade" when he accepted election as President of the United Federation of Labour. His defence was simple: that he was acting in the interests of working class unity. In any case, the political programme of the new S.D.P. was more "logical and coherent" than that of the U.L.P. or the old L.P. before it. "Imagine a party having in its platform a 'right to work' plank, such as that of the now defunct U.L.P., and at the same time a plank for 'unemployment insurance'!" scoffed Young.

A circular was sent out to members of the Seamen's Union from Young's office in Wellington within days of the close of the Congress, announcing a ballot of members on affiliation to the new UFOL and SDP. Calling for a "Yes" vote, the circular argued that affiliation would "*tend to protect us as a union against the arrogant and persistent encroachments upon our Union by a powerfully entrenched, magnificently-equipped, and merciless foe — the Shipowners' Federation.*" It was signed by Young, Donovan, and Belcher.

Meanwhile a stopwork meeting of the Union in Wellington, after hearing Young and Donovan report on the Congress, resolved that "it supports the findings of the Congress and urges our brother members to vote in favour of amalgamation with the new bodies as a greater measure of protecting our interests as seamen".

The right wing opposition, however, was intransigent. Edward Mackie, a member of the Auckland Branch's delegation to the Congress, issued a circular in his own name calling for a "No" vote. After giving a quite fallacious account of the size of capitation fees payable to the new bodies, Mackie declared (with more imagination than cogency) that affiliation to the UFOL would mean that "we would be at the whim and caprice of the National Executive, the same people who engineered the Waihi fiasco. . . I beg my fellow seamen to vote against the proposal and maintain our well-earned and reputable independence".

When the ballot-papers arrived from Wellington, the Auckland opposition was able to do more than persuade the members to vote "No". In control of the Auckland Branch executive, the right wing refused to distribute the ballot-papers, and right-wingers on the Dunedin executive managed to prevent Belcher from distributing them there also. The result was that the ballot was effective only in Wellington, and although the fairly reassuring majority in favour of affiliation among Wellington members could legally have been held binding on the whole Union, the Wellington officials were prevented from even affiliating the Wellington Branch by the clause of the newly approved Union rules which prevented not only the Union, but any single Branch, from entering into any outside affiliation without Council approval.

The right wing, in short, had stymied the Union from acting together as a Union in the most significant activity the New Zealand labour movement had so far produced in its history.

Young was placed in the extraordinary position of being President, by virtue of his position in the Seamen's Union, of a national trade union body to which the Seamen's Union was not affiliated! The debate on the matter inside the Union, however, did not have time to be resolved before events took another turn, and the Union found itself forced by the Massey Government into following willy-nilly the new militant position adopted by its General Secretary.

The fact was that, enraged by the new spirit of unity among the working class around an apparently militant policy, and encouraged by the success of the mineowners' tactics at Waihi and the solid support they had received from the Massey Government, the employers of New Zealand had determined to organise another all-out offensive as they had done 23 years

before. The UFOL, like the Maritime Council, was to be strangled in its infancy before it had a chance of achieving any successes for the working class of New Zealand at the expense of their employers. And the role of the trigger-man, as in 1890, was allotted to the U.S.S.Co. . . .

The ground on which the employers chose to fight was an apparently marginal and insignificant matter concerning a small and isolated group of workers. But the employers knew full well that the machinery of the new UFOL would immediately involve most of the transport industry, and this was where the Red Fed was strongest and where the employers were most desirous of smashing it once and for all. The U.S.S.Co. knew that when it arbitrarily ceased paying travelling time to shipwrights on the Wellington Patent Slip, within days the Government would be given the opportunity to use the loopholes in the Arbitration Act, already tested at Waihi, to shatter the whole fabric of militant unionism.

For over 30 years, the Patent Slip men had been either carried to and from work or paid travelling time without question. Their first intimation that the practice was to stop was the short pay received in their envelopes on Friday, 17 October 1913. Having recently decided by ballot to dissolve their own union (extant since 1873) and enjoy the protection of membership in the much larger Waterside Workers' Union with its important affiliations, the men placed the dispute immediately in the Waterside Workers' Union's hands. The Company, quite irrationally, refused to recognise the Union as spokesman for its shipwright members. The Union conducted a ballot of the men concerned, and they downed tools as from Saturday morning, 18 October. As the employers flatly refused to negotiate the matter, the W.W.U. called a stopwork meeting for 8 a.m. on Wednesday 22nd to decide on further action, and this meeting decided by an overwhelming (almost unanimous) majority to hand the dispute over to the UFOL. However, after the meeting, when the watersiders offered themselves for work only 80 minutes late (as they had done several times before without threats of reprisal), they found themselves locked out by decision of the employers on the grounds that the stopwork was "a flagrant breach of the agreement". A second meeting of the W.W.U. called for 1 p.m. that day resolved that "no work shall be accepted until the victimised men are reinstated". The strike had begun.

Young, as president of the UFOL, was immediately involv-

ed with the secretary, Pat Hickey, in endeavouring to secure a settlement of the wharf stoppage before it spread. To some extent the prospects were complicated by the fact that the Miners' Union at Huntly had stopped work on 18th October on an entirely unrelated (but equally provoked) issue concerning the arbitrary dismissal of 16 active Unionists. The UFOL did its best to keep the two matters separate, but it was increasingly difficult. Miners at mine after mine throughout the country stopped work over the next few days in support of both their Huntly comrades and the Wellington watersiders.

Young and Hickey were told flatly by the shipowners that they regarded the existing agreement with the Wellington watersiders as terminated by the workers' "flagrant breach" (the 80-minute stopwork), and that they would discuss nothing except a new agreement to be registered under the I.C. and A. Act. The owners immediately advertised for scab labour, and signed on a motley collection of clerks and retired businessmen to work cargo on the wharves behind protective barricades of hurdles and packing-cases which were erected to shield the scabs from the eyes — and taunts — of the Union pickets. But the first day they were erected, pickets swarmed through them and over them to visit the first fully scab-manned job, and they succeeded in persuading a number of scabs to walk off.

But the intervention of the State "in the interests of law and order" soon put a stop to such manifestations of peaceful persuasion. Within a week, contingents of police were brought into Wellington from country districts to parade the waterfront with batons drawn, and a unit of the regular army was marched through the area one morning as the scabs were arriving at work, and halted in front of the Post Office while a machine-gun was mounted on the roof of the building.

Repeated UFOL endeavours to obtain a settlement resulted in a brief conference between the W.W.U. and the shipowners in Prime Minister Massey's office on 28 October. Here the owners laid down their minimum terms for peace: that the watersiders should disband their union and form a new one registered under the I.C. and A. Act, with which a new Agreement could be negotiated; or the existing Union would be recognised and the existing agreement allowed to run for another three years on payment by the Union of £1000 as surety against any future stoppage. The fact that the penalty was exactly 10 times the maximum laid down in the I.C. and A.

Act indicated that the employers' terms amounted to "*arbitration or starvation*". The Union could do nothing else but reject them.

The same day, the UFOL instructed the Auckland W.W.U. to refuse labour for unloading coal boats diverted from Wellington, and the following day Westport watersiders resolved to stop work until the Wellington dispute was settled. On 30 October, in the absence of any sign of compromise by the employers, the UFOL called out all watersiders in other ports.

Clearly the chance of the seamen becoming involved had now become a probability. On 31 October, Young received a telegram from Belcher suggesting that "all efforts should be made to restrain men from ceasing work unless officially advised by the Union to do so. The spasmodic action of certain crews is up against everything appertaining to our agreement." Already Young had had difficulty in persuading crews of ships in Wellington not to walk off, and the Wellington Union had ended up by giving the normal Union instruction to all members to hand in notice the moment they were expected to allow a ship to be loaded or unloaded by scab labour. It was apparent that the Union was soon going to need a coherent national policy towards the strike.

On Sunday 2nd November, the UFOL called a mass rally of strikers and fellow-unionists at the Basin Reserve, and an impressive array of orators took the stump to clarify the strike issues and relay messages of support from unionists elsewhere. Among the speakers were Holland, Bennett, Mills, Hickey, and Young. Recounting the employers' latest demands, Young declared that it would be "*better that they sould go to Karori in a 6 by 2 than submit to such conditions.*" (Cheers.) "*I have no grudge against the police, but if they and the proposed specials are utilised, and if the authorities should employ the artillery, I will undertake to march on Wellington with 10,000 armed men.*" (Applause.) "*If the police use their batons, the unionists should give it to them back — and make it a double-header.*" (Applause.) . . . "*If there is any reason to incite people, I'll incite them.*"

These words were faithfully reported in the *Maoriland Worker*, but, unknown to the speaker, they were equally faithfully reported by a plain clothes police spy in the audience to his superior officers — a fact which was later to have instructive repercussions.

The extension of the strike to watersiders in other ports

persuaded the employers' federation to agree to meet the UFOL executive under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. At this meeting (held on Monday 3 November) the UFOL proposed a settlement on the basis of a return to work under pre-strike conditions followed by a conference to negotiate a new agreement including a penalty (to be negotiated) for any future stoppage. After 24 hours' consideration, the employers rejected the proposal. All men desiring future work on the waterfront, they said, would have to join the new scab unions (formed for the most part with an initial membership entirely made up of special constables) registered under the Arbitration Act. There was nothing further to negotiate with the UFOL or the old watersiders' unions about, the employers insisted. And they knew that they spoke from a position of strength.

While Massey was chairing the meeting, orders were being issued in his name for the enrolment of unlimited numbers of special constables, and the supply of horses and batons for the intimidation of pickets. Regular police had been used during the previous week to clear pickets from the streets fronting the wharves in Wellington and Auckland, and the following week thousands of farmers' sons, "*degenerate scum from the country*" (in the words which brought the venerable Tregear a charge of "using offensive language" a few days later), descended on the main ports and maintained a constant war of terror in the name of "Law and Order" against anyone in the vicinity of the waterfront or of a strikers' gathering, making themselves especially unpopular by their brutality towards people who were obviously no more than curious bystanders, and even to small boys who gave them cheek.

On the evening of 3 November, the Wellington Branch of the Seamen's Union met and unanimously carried a number of resolutions. One conveyed "fraternal greetings to and sympathy with the watersiders now fighting for their just rights" and supported the Branch Executive's policy that all seamen aboard any ship should hand in 24 hours' notice in terms of their Agreement the moment scab labour was used to work cargo for or off the ship. Another resolution rejected the moves by Auckland and Dunedin Branch officials to try to force Young to resign either his Union post or the UFOL presidency, and expressed the "hope and trust that he will hold both positions to the bitter end". The meeting also called for a national meeting of Branch delegates to determine the

Union's national stand on a dispute which was increasingly involving the members in all ports.

New proposals for a settlement, declared by Massey to be "very reasonable", were submitted to him by the UFOL on 7 November, but without any response. On 8 November, 18 unions in Auckland called all their members out on strike in protest against the quartering in the city of special constables (referred to by the unions more accurately as "strike-breakers"). On 10 and 11 November, representatives of the Dunedin and Auckland branches of the Seamen's Union arrived in Wellington, but experienced some difficulty in locating Young, whose office had been forcibly (and quite illegally) occupied by a posse of "specials". He was finally found on a picket-line, and the meeting opened with some initial recriminations, in which Belcher was accused of having persuaded the Dunedin seamen to keep working with scab wharf labour, both Auckland and Dunedin delegates were accused of collusion in trying to keep the seamen "aloof" from a general strike on "important unionist principles", and Belcher accused Young of allowing the Union to be "dragged at somebody else's chariot-wheels". Finally, the Dunedin delegates (led rather by the youthful Bill Clarke than by the ageing Belcher) separated from their Auckland colleagues on the basis of Dunedin's compliance with the Council decision to deregister from the Arbitration system and Auckland's continued refusal to do so, and Belcher was able to claim that his actions in the south had been "tragically misinterpreted", especially by Lyttelton watersiders who had booed him as he boarded the ferry on his way to Wellington. His sole concern, he claimed, had been to protect the Union by abiding by a directive from the Australian Seamen's Union Executive to keep the inter-island ferries running so long as no scab labour was used. This ruling had now been overtaken by events.

In the end, after prolonged discussion and a fervent appeal by Young, echoed by Belcher, to the traditions of the Union and the sacred principles of unionism, a spirit of greater unanimity prevailed. It was agreed that Young could not reasonably be expected at this stage to sever his official connection with either the UFOL or the Union, and that all difficulties and misunderstandings had arisen from the lack of communication between Branches and the fact that the Union had reacted to the dispute piecemeal "as events presented themselves", without any concerted policy.

In this spirit, it was unanimously resolved that "*the time has arrived when all our members under the control of the New Zealand Seamen's Union should give 24 hours' notice to leave their ships*". From 11 November, the seamen were officially on strike alongside the watersiders and the miners.

The same day, a number of UFOL and SDP leaders were arrested on charges of sedition, seditious utterance, inciting a breach of the peace, and other charges arising out of statements made by them at public meetings. It was known that a warrant was out for Young among the rest, but he proved elusive to the police for some weeks. Although, when finally arrested, Young was released on bail (together with Fraser, Semple, and Holland), he found his activities severely restricted from this point, and Smithyman, a member of the Union's branch executive in Wellington who was widely known as an I.W.W. supporter was appointed by the Branch to take over Young's duties as Union secretary "pro tem."

Meantime, clashes between strikers and specials became increasingly frequent and increasingly violent. Pitched battles occurred almost daily in Wellington's Featherston Street and Auckland's Quay Street, with specials galloping their horses headlong into orderly picket lines and bashing their hefty wooden clubs (of a special type manufactured for the purpose by Government specification) on the heads of watersiders, seamen, or anyone else who chanced within range. The unionists didn't need to be incited by the oratory of Young or Semple to sometimes answer one blow with another. Hate and violence became the regular pattern of waterfront streets. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that New Zealand smouldered on the verges of civil war.

The counter-measures taken by the strikers, however, were often lighthearted enough. One contingent of farm boys, known unaffectionately as "Massey's Cossacks", had a memorable trip across Dyers' Pass to Lyttelton. The Lyttelton Strike Committee had received warning of their probable time of arrival, and the full width of the road was scattered with a thick layer of 2-inch furniture tacks. ("Ha'penny a box, they cost," an old seaman recalls.) That journey to the battlefield took longer than scheduled, and quite a few poor horses were unfit for cavalry charges against the rebellious toilers of the sea for several days.

"I am delighted to hear your news re the specials returning," wrote Smithyman to Lane, the seamen's representative

on the Lyttelton Strike Committee. "Only wish I could say the same re Wellington, but ours must be an extra brand of scabs. They seem to enjoy it. The *Maunganui* got away with a crew of scabs with spurs and batons — but I don't think the spurs will help much to fill the fires, though the batons might come in handy for breaking up the coal. . . The most peculiar facet of the scabs working on the wharf is that they are often having small strikes amongst themselves for more pay and kicking up rows because they don't get enough overtime."

Support from overseas was forthcoming for the strikers, but cables of solidarity were more numerous than concrete assistance. Both the UFOL and the Seamen's Union sent delegates across to Australia to organise support, and not only did Australian Unionists respond by blacklisting New Zealand ships loaded or manned by scabs, but they were also generous with money. At one point, £500 reached the Seamen's Union office in Wellington in a single lump from the Australian Seamen's Union, but the amounts thinned out as Australian unions themselves became involved in stoppages of their own. Among the early messages came a cable from the secretary of the London Dockers' Union, Ben Tillett, promising that no scab-loaded cargo would be handled at the heart of empire — but ships were readily diverted to other British ports where unionism was less forthright.

As November wore on and the employers showed no inclination to reach a settlement, Hughes managed to persuade the Australian watersiders to lift their ban on New Zealand ships. Coal was imported into New Zealand from South Africa and Japan. Union funds began to dry up, and starvation faced the families of many strikers. The bitterness of being bludgeoned in the streets began to turn slowly to despair.

Many of the most effective leaders were in jail, and others under threat of sentence. Literally hundreds of strikers were imprisoned for various offences. Ships and ports were increasingly worked by scab labour under armed protection, and the police, soldiers, and specials did less toiling on the wharves and more swaggering and fighting in the streets. As increasing numbers of demoralised unionists slunk off to take jobs elsewhere, the scenes of violence in the streets assumed less of the quality of battles than of lynchings.

Labour members were not backward in attacking the Massey Government for its utterly indefensible handling of the stop-

pages and the manner in which it had thrown the armed power of the State in on the side of the employers. Even the official Liberal Opposition suggested as late as 27 November that the dispute should be settled by arbitration, but though the UFOL declared its acceptance of this proposal, the employers rejected it out of hand. There was, they declared, "nothing to arbitrate about". They had certainly not lost sight of their original purpose in provoking the dispute, and had no intention of giving up the chance of total victory when it was already in sight.

On 9 December, the UFOL executive decided to call a conference in Wellington of delegates of all affiliated unions on strike. Unaffiliated unions on strike (with the Seamen's Union heading the list) were also invited, but though Young chaired the conference in his presidential capacity, the Union decided that its delegates should meet separately, while keeping contact with the UFOL conference through Young.

The conference met from 12 to 15 December. It was apparent from the reports of delegates that the Waterside Workers' Unions at Auckland and Wellington had been effectively smashed, both ports being fully operative with scab labour. The only ports where the strike continued to be effective and the members solid were Lyttelton, New Plymouth, Greymouth, and Westport. Elsewhere, the branches had plumped for a return to work on the employers' terms, or were wavering towards doing so.

The conference, being informed of the decision of the Seamen's Union to commence negotiations for a return to work conditional on a settlement being reached by the miners, resolved that "the wisest course to pursue is to endeavour to preserve what organisation we have" and devise "some basis of settlement". The Seamen's Union conference decided the same day to negotiate for a return to work on the basis of conditions prevailing before the strike, provided that there would be no victimisation and that the sole scab seamen's "union" formed (in Auckland) would cease to be recognised by the employers.

The UFOL conference drew up a 7-point basis for settlement, including no victimisation, membership of scab wharf unions to be open, old conditions prevailing in ports where no scab unions had been registered, and dissolution of scab miners' unions. These terms were conveyed to Massey with the request that he arrange a meeting with the employers under the chairmanship of some mutually acceptable citizen of stand-

ing, three names being suggested (including Chief Justice Stout, and an eccentric Tory member of the Upper House, Hon. T. W. Hislop, who had helped finance Tom Mann's tour of New Zealand).

Meantime the Seamen's Union was asked to meet the ship-owners to discuss its proposed terms, and in the absence of Northern Co. representatives from Auckland, they were all agreed to with the addition of an undertaking by the Union to register all branches under the Arbitration Act and to allow all qualified seamen among the scabs to remain in their jobs provided they joined the Union. At the request of the UFOL conference, the seamen also urged the shipowners to "bring pressure to bear" on the mine-owners to reach a similar agreement with the miners, but the shipowners declared that this was "none of our business".

The Wellington delegates were hesitant about signing an agreement to return to work until the UFOL had obtained some sort of agreement in respect of at least the miners and those waterfront unions that were still intact: but Auckland and Dunedin delegates could see no point in delaying. There was afterwards a good deal of ill-feeling over the seamen's decision. The watersiders claimed that it had "forced the hand" of the UFOL in calling on the watersiders to return to work on 20th December, but in fact the Seamen's Union and the UFOL kept close contact throughout the critical days, and anyway the economic impact of the wharf stoppage had been broken for many weeks.

The Seamen's Union's basis for settlement with the ship-owners was endorsed by meetings in Auckland and Dunedin, but rejected in Wellington on the grounds that "there can be no sectional settlement of a general strike. . . We should stand by the Federation." The Wellington Branch was persuaded to obey the return to work call only on 19th December when the Northern Co. had given a firm undertaking to abide by the same conditions as other employers — and even then Donovan's speech in favour of "accepting what is inevitable before we are utterly smashed" was greeted at a meeting of the Wellington Branch by cries of "Traitor!" and "Stand by the Federation!"

The final stages of the Seamen's Union's peace conference with the employers are surrounded by some confusion. The Northern Co.'s representatives, who arrived late, took part in the fag-end of the discussions, but they refused to sit down at

the same table with Young because of his connection with the "Red Fed", and, despite the protest of the other Union delegates, Young eventually persuaded them that he should withdraw in the interests of all provided that Pryor, who was secretary of both the Shipowners' Federation and the N.Z. Employers' Federation, withdrew also. It was in the absence of these two that the Northern Co. gave its assent to the terms of settlement, but for some inexplicable reason its representatives rushed off to catch the Auckland express without actually signing it. As soon as the seamen had returned to work, the Northern Co. disavowed the agreement by insisting on continuing to recognise the new scab union in Auckland and refusing to get rid of unqualified scab crews.

Commented Young: "It can be safely said that had the seamen dreamed that the Northern Co., or any other owner, was going to commit such a flagrant and dishonourable act, they would not have returned to work. The trouble would have gone on to the bitter end."

Even with other employers, the Union had enough trouble ensuring that the agreed terms of settlement were honoured. Specific instructions were sent to delegates: "Regarding the men now in the boats and not members, the qualified sailors, firemen, greasers etc. must join the Union at once or get over the rail; all the unqualified ones must get out."

Many members returning to work were not in a position to meet their Union dues. In mid-January, the Union wrote to one delegate: "Members of the Union that have joined ships since the strike was declared off may be allowed to go on to the end of the month before squaring up. Members that joined ships during the strike must pay up or get out — we prefer the latter, because they are pure-bred wasters and a disgrace to unionism."

Young's conviction for "inciting a breach of the peace" had resulted in a 3-month prison sentence, but he was out on bail during the final settlement negotiations pending an appeal to the Supreme Court. The appeal was heard in February 1914 before Stout, and Young was represented by Wilford (the front-bench Liberal M.P.) and P. J. O'Regan. They argued that if Young's offence was as serious as the sentence suggested, then it was amazing that Young should not have been arrested until three weeks after he had committed it; and that it was "absurd" to convict a man of "inciting" when he

had only told his audience, "in general terms, that if ever a constable hits you in the future, you should hit him back".

The Crown's argument was that Young's words had been used at a time when "relations between strikers and constables were tense", and that, as to the delay in the arrest, Young had been arrested "as soon as order was restored". The Chief Justice held that there were no legal grounds for setting aside the conviction or the sentence, and Young accordingly spent the next three months in His Majesty's Prison on the Terrace (which stood on the site now occupied by Te Aro School). By resolution of the Council, the Seamen's Union provided for the maintenance of Young's family, and the office was looked after by Smithyman.

Interviewed by the *Maoriland Worker* on his release in May, Young described prison conditions in terms which were of great value to campaigners for penal reform for some years afterwards. The food, he said, was "*fit for animals . . . though the bread made excellent cricket balls*"; the washing facilities were "monstrous"; and the prison library contained "*no books of an educational character whatever, though if anyone wanted to know how to break out of jail, he would probably find that information in the sort of book they had there*". He insisted that the political prisoners, at least, had nothing against the prison officers, many of whom "seemed as badly off as the prisoners. . . Single officers are even locked in cells at night!"

Young still had to face a separate charge of "sedition" arising out of the same speech, and though he was convicted, the jury added a "strong recommendation for mercy", and he was eventually discharged on probation. By the time the hearing was over, the Massey Government had committed New Zealand to war alongside Britain, and young New Zealanders were being sent by the thousand to die in the fields of northern France and the deserts of the Middle East. The word "sedition" had come in this context to have a somewhat different meaning, and the authorities were anxious to obliterate the bitter internal divisions of the strike under a tidal wave of patriotism.

It was the war of 1914-1918, horrible as that event was for the thousands of New Zealand workers' homes which lost fathers and brothers and sons, that enabled the Seamen's Union (and other industrial organisations which had suffered even more) to rebuild the strength and unity which had been shattered by the events of 1912 and 1913.

REORGANISING TO FIGHT BACK: 1914-1920

It was a long, tough job cleaning up the Union after the defeat of 1913. Not only was it necessary to root out scabbery by forcing the scabs off the ships or (in rare cases) converting them into clean unionists, but the three branches of the Union had been left bitterly divided by the policies pursued during the strike, and the restoration of a national seamen's organisation required careful and patient negotiations between men who seemed to have little in common except their connection with the same industry.

The work of purging those who had joined ships during the strike proceeded slowly but steadily. For scabs who had been Union members before the strike, there was little mercy: but the persuasive power of the Union was able to win over some of the "new sailors" to a degree of loyalty which was to stand the test of later strikes and to disprove the super-militants' slogan "Once a scab, always a scab".

Scabbery still remains the cardinal sin in the world of trade unionism. A man who will take another man's job at a time when that other man has responded to a collective call to withdraw his labour in order to persuade his employer to buy that labour on fairer terms, is a hard man to forgive. He endangers the whole principle of unionism, which aims, by welding the collective strength of the workers, to achieve a bargaining position which no single worker could achieve on his own. The total ignorance of simple principle which the scab displays casts serious reflections on his moral integrity. Jack London, the popular American novelist, expressed all the traditional contempt for the scab in a memorable prose-passage which was printed in handbill form and distributed widely on New Zealand ships and waterfronts during the 1913 strike, and again in 1951. Those who were forgiven had, understandably, to pass through some purgatorial experiences before they were accepted as clean. Many were dr'ven off the ships by means which sound crude today, and which certainly allowed little opportunity for the slow process of educating them in trade unionism — except in a very negative sense.

The second job, that of re-uniting the Union nationally, also proved difficult, but not insurmountable. In Auckland, where the leadership continued to make it known that it regarded the seamen's involvement in the 1913 stoppage as a "catastrophic mistake", there were early signs of a move among the rank and file to force the reorganisation issue in spite of the leaders' opposition.

A circular appeared in Auckland early in 1914 over the signatures of two wellknown Union members, Hillman and Lane, the latter having represented the Union on the Lyttelton Strike Committee. It called on members to insist on the reorganisation of the Union on a national basis in order to "prepare for the next go". It accused the Union of having contributed to its own defeat through being "crippled from the start by BAD FINANCES, BAD MANAGEMENT, and MISUNDERSTANDING"; and declared that the agreement to return to work had been signed "without the knowledge of the men". What was needed, it said, was the re-formation of a national body with headquarters in Wellington, an improvement in the liaison between the Union officials and the members on the ships, the power of recall of any official by majority vote at any time, and for members to "take more interest in their own business and reduce the power of the Executive", and to "help make in New Zealand One Big Union so that we may claim our rights which are denied us today, and so make this country in reality a workers' paradise". The reference to "One Big Union" clearly indicated the I.W.W. influence on the two signatories to the circular, but support for its general line was forthcoming from a much wider section of Auckland members than the tiny following of the "wobblies".

Kneen issued an indignant circular in reply, charging Lane and Hillman with "a deliberate attempt to mislead and breed internal strife", and re-stating the right wing view of recent events:

"The Seamen's Union has never in the past gained one iota from using the strike weapon. . . The experiences gained during the '90 and the last strike evidences that nothing but failure can follow the further application of the tactics then tried. The last strike was not ours; it was the waterside workers'. It originated in Wellington, and was pushed on by the syndicalists. . . "

The "syndicalists" had been described, Kneen recalled, by the Australian Labour leader, W. M. Hughes, as "extremists . . . worse enemies of Labour than any employers".

An approach from the Wellington Branch to take part in a national conference with a view to re-forming the national seamen's organisation was received by Kneen with acute suspicion. Young's role in the Red Fed and the strike had led to his being identified (in the eyes of the old "Lib-Labs") with the wild syndicalism of the "wobblies". But the groundswell of opinion among Auckland branch members in favour of getting the national Union back into operation as soon as possible, together with the cautious and tactful tone of the Wellington Branch letters, eventually persuaded the Auckland officials that they should co-operate. They had already begun to realise that they would need the backing of a strong organisation in other centres if they were going to break the scab union still being recognised by the Northern Co.

The Dunedin office, however, had failed completely to respond to Young's communications since the strike, and had conducted the affairs of the local branch as if no national organisation had ever existed. The Wellington executive decided that Young and a fellow executive member should travel to Dunedin and endeavour to establish contact, but they arrived at the Dunedin office one June morning in 1914 to be told by a glowering Belcher: "I don't know you!" Young later recorded that Belcher then "commenced a tirade of abuse towards me in particular, alleging that I was pretty well everything unholy on the earth side of the sun, and using most filthy profane language" (naturally very shocking to an old seaman!) and threatened violence.

After this scene, Young made contact with other responsible members of the Branch. Bill Clarke and others assured him that they sympathised with his endeavours, and saw the urgent need for a united organisation, but that "the members down here won't move a muscle without Bill Belcher. . . . They know his weaknesses all right, but they respect him for what he's done for them in the past. You'll just have to keep on trying to bring him round."

As a result, Young recommended that the Wellington and Auckland branches should meet by themselves to re-form the national body, "leaving Dunedin to come in later" — but a conciliatory letter from Kneen to Belcher was eventually successful in persuading the Dunedin branch to be represented

at a meeting to be held in Auckland, and it finally convened on 20 July 1914 at Kneen's home in Ponsonby.

It was an historic occasion for the Union, and its significance was celebrated by the decision taken after several days of talks to have a special photograph taken of the delegates. Despite the background of ill-feeling, it succeeded in welding the three branches back into a single union with an integrated national structure along the lines which had operated just before the 1890 strike but had never been attempted again since. There was resistance at first, especially from Belcher and Kneen, to the radical proposals put forward by Young for overcoming the disunity and ensuring that it never reached such proportions again. But the junior delegates from Auckland and Dunedin, notably Bill Clarke, managed to bridge the gulf between the opposing points of view and swing the balance in favour of Wellington's line. It was decided to re-register the three branches of the Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand under the I.C. and A. Act as separate unions with identical rules, with annual elections for the officers of all constituent unions subject to a ballot of the financial membership of the entire Federation. A query telegraphed from the meeting to the Labour Department in Wellington elicited the reply that this latter arrangement would be quite in order so long as "the rules of each constituent union specify that officers are so elected". It was also resolved that no Branch could withdraw from the Federation except by a plebiscite vote of a majority of its financial members, and that there should be a ballot of all members on the location of the Federation's national office.

The problem of the scab union at Auckland was considered at length, and the decision was reached to have its registration under the I.C. and A. Act challenged legally, with expenses borne by all Branches equally. The outcome was a decision by the Arbitration Court that the co-existence of two awards covering the same industry and both giving "preference to unionists" meant that "equal preference to both unions" was guaranteed by the employers recognising both unions! This extraordinary decision applied, in fact, only to Northern Co. ships, and it at least had the advantage of strengthening the hand of the old unionists in demanding jobs on these ships and in resisting attempts to force them into the "New Union". In the long run it gave them the opening through which they were able to reduce the "New Union"

to utter impotence, and within two years its officials had to acknowledge defeat and apply for reamalgamation with the official F.S.U. branch.

Meantime the Wellington branch faced legal difficulties with the interpretation of the agreement for resumption of work after the strike. Four former Union members on the *Mangapapa* had ignored the strike call and continued working throughout the stoppage. After the strike, they had desired to rejoin the Union in order to keep their jobs in terms of the agreement entered into by the shipowners for concluding the stoppage, but when asked for their dues they refused to pay them unless their books were stamped with the words "Loyal Member 1913 Strike"! The Union naturally refused to give them a citation they had done rather less than nothing to deserve, so they refused to pay their dues, and the Union asked the Karamea Steamship Co. to sack them as non-members, in terms of the agreement. The Company claimed that the men concerned *had* to be taken back into the Union in terms of the agreement, but the Union's stand was fortified by a legal opinion that the loyalty stamp was legal, its use was at the absolute discretion of the Union, and that, as unfinancial members the four men would have to be dismissed regardless of how they had become unfinancial. The Company might well have challenged the issue if it had not been for the outbreak of war and the accelerated departure of scabs from all ships under the twin pressures of Union activity and manpower shortages elsewhere.

Young, and a number of others prominent in the strike, still had faith in the continued ability of the UFOL to act as the instrument of unity among the New Zealand working class. After agreeing to be represented at both a conference of the UFOL and a conference of Arbitration Unions called by the Auckland Trades Council (both in July 1914), the Wellington Branch of the Seamen's Union had urged the Wellington Trades Council to co-operate to the maximum extent with the UFOL and "pave the way for the solidification of the present opposing labour factions".

The prospects of labour unity had been considerably enhanced by events since the Unity Congress, despite the divisions over the strike and its disastrous defeat. By-elections in Grey and Lyttelton before and during the strike had resulted in the election to Parliament of two candidates of the Social Democratic Party — Paddy Webb and James McCombs — who had undertaken to co-operate with the four "U.L.P." and

independent Labour members (including A. H. Hindmarsh) to form an extremely effective core of battlers for the Labour cause in Parliament.

All the same, there remained strong resistance among the "craft" unions of the Trades Council to joining forces with the remnants of the militant "red feds." Following the official absorption of the "U.L.P." into the Social Democratic Party at the Unity Congress, the Trades Councils had sponsored the formation of Labour Representation Committees to stand Labour candidates independent of the S.D.P. at the 1914 elections, when four Labour candidates were returned again together with the two S.D.P. members, and the ground was laid for the amalgamation of the two political Labour groups into the New Zealand Labour Party at a joint conference in 1916.

The 1914 elections provided one avenue for the vigorous settling of old scores by the unionists involved in the strike of the year before — and that was in campaigning against the Cabinet Ministers responsible for the Government's part in events. Especially vulnerable to attack was the Minister of Marine, F. M. B. Fisher, who, besides having been responsible for the suspension of the Shipping Act which enabled unqualified scab crews to keep the ships running in 1913, was especially hated as one of the renegade "Liberals" who had hoisted Massey into power in the first place — and, furthermore, as member for Wellington Central he was strategically placed to serve as a target for the revenge of the maritime unions.

No Labour or S.D.P. candidate was nominated to split the anti-Tory vote of Fisher's Liberal opponent, who must have been surprised at some of the support he received. The Seamen's Union contributed a widely distributed pamphlet to the campaign in the form of *An Open Letter to F. M. B. Fisher* by W. T. Young, in which the Minister was scathingly accused of having broken a specific promise in suspending the Shipping and Seamen Act without the consent of the Seamen's Union, and of having enabled ships to be manned by men with neither knowledge nor experience, "to the utmost peril of the lives of men, women, and children"; of having broken agreements with the Union covering wages and conditions on Government steamers; and of having discriminated against seamen in allowing troops departing for overseas service to register a vote in the elections before sailing, but

refusing the same facility to the crews of the ships that were carrying them.

Fisher, who had previously brazened out cries of "Turncoat!" with the retort that "consistency is the refuge of fools", tried to smile through the angry interjections which turned his election meetings into pandemonium. But the smile had faded by election night. The campaign of vengeance had done its work, and though the Massey Government scraped home with exactly half of the seats in the House (helped by the rising tide of war-time jingoism), Fisher was ignominiously defeated.

The Federated Seamen's Union was re-formed on the lines laid down by the 1914 conference, and all its three constituents duly registered under the I.C. and A. Act. A national ballot of members decided that Wellington was the logical place for the Union's Head Office, and Tom Young resumed office as General Secretary. In a circular issued to all members of the Union in September 1915, Young declared: "It is more than gratifying to be able to say that complete unanimity, harmony, and uniformity now exist between all the Locals, and Local Officers in New Zealand for the common betterment of each and every member".

Then, like a bolt from the blue, the Massey Government exacted its counter-revenge. An amendment was introduced to the I.C. and A. Act which flatly contradicted all "preference for unionists" clauses in Awards and agreements by requiring workers to be employed in an industry before applying for membership in the union, set maximum figures for union dues and entrance fees, and laid down that no worker could be excluded from a Union for any reason so long as he was "of good character" and "sober habits" (*"whatever that means"*, as Young sourly remarked).

The Union worked in close co-operation with the Social Democrat and Labour M.P.s in combating this measure, but without success. With half Parliament belonging to the Government party, and a number of independents committed to their support, Massey's colleagues were able to storm the amendment through. Opinion began to harden inside the Union in favour of de-registration from the arbitration system once more as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Other changes began to occur in the Union that year. Kneen collapsed with an illness which was, within two years, to end in his death, and "Honest" Tom Anderson was elected to the position of Acting Secretary of the Auckland Branch, known

as the supporter of policies somewhat more militant than those favoured by Kneen. Shortly afterwards, a delegate on a Dunedin ship laid a formal complaint with Head Office about the unsatisfactory operation of the Dunedin branch. Allegations covered irregularities in the conduct of Branch meetings, Union business, and finances, and all of them were associated with "unstable behaviour" on the part of Belcher. Belcher was summoned to a special meeting of the Union's Council, and undertakings were accepted from him that the situation would improve. . . . But within two years the Union was to be forced to part company with its old leader forever. From early in 1916, the Union appointed a wellknown seamen's outfitter who had given invaluable help during the 1913 strike — Felix Newfield — as its Agent in Lyttelton on the basis of a small weekly retainer plus 2½% commission on dues collected. Old faces were disappearing from the front rank, new ones taking their place.

A new agreement was negotiated with the Shipowners Federation in 1915, in which the effects of the war on the labour market and the economy generally made themselves felt in a 25s a month wage rise. The same pressures, however, made it increasingly difficult to police the "preference clause" in cases where crews were being hurriedly recruited for troopships, and the Union had some difficulty in persuading the authorities that the proper interpretation of the clause meant that all seamen engaged on troopships should be required to join the Union.

The men who sailed those ships were just as open to the attacks of the enemy as the troops they carried. From early in the war, the Pacific Ocean was a haunt of German raiders — not quite as thick with them as the Atlantic, but thick enough to ensure the maintenance of a continued threat to the lifelines of British trade — which was (after all) the whole motivation for the Kaiser's war against Britain. The constant danger of deliberate sinking by the enemy was added to the normal perils of the New Zealand seamen's life and work. . . But his work had to go on. It was his livelihood.

There seemed to the Union to be a good case for a general exemption of seamen from the Conscription Law which was brought down by the Government in 1916. "*Massey's political circus opened for business on Tuesday*," wrote Young to Cooper, the secretary of the Australian Seamen's Union the week Parliament opened in May 1916, "*and it is apparent*

that the leading dummy will be a chap called Conscription — not of Wealth (oh no!) but of humanity. . . The ANZACs under the good old Southern Cross make history while Fat stretches himself and soothes his soul (if he ever had one) thinking of our dear boys at the front' !"

The Labour movement campaigned vigorously against conscription from the beginning, labelling the war as "an imperialist bloodbath" and pointing out the gross social discrimination involved in conscripting the lives of working men (the only capital they possessed) but not the wealth of the rich. Fraser, Holland, and others were jailed for "sedition" for their anti-conscription activities, and even the editor of the *Manawatu Times* was charged with "publishing seditious matter" when his paper carried a letter opposing conscription of soldiers "to fight for the wool kings and moneyed classes". The seamen's traditional allies, the coal miners, were active not only in agitating against conscription, but in operating an "underground railway" by which working class conscripts from the cities were assisted in eluding call-up by hiding in the West Coast bush and fed from the mining villages. Paddy Webb, veteran miners' leader and M.P. for Grey, was disqualified from his seat in Parliament for his refusal of military service.

The Seamen's Union was not unaffected by this agitation, but its official activities in the matter were restricted to pressing for exemption for seamen from military call-up on the grounds of the essential and hazardous nature of their work, coupled with circulars giving members detailed instructions on how to appeal against service if conscripted. The Union's detestation of the Massey Government had been in no way lessened by two years of war, or by the "broadening" of the Government into a Coalition to include the Liberals (leaving the handful of Labour members, under the increasingly militant leadership of the Wellington Seamen's ex-President, Hindmarsh, as the sole effective Opposition). One anti-conscription circular issued by the Union included also a detailed account of the Government's flat refusal to restore recognition to the Union as spokesmen for the crews of Government ships, which had been withdrawn during the strike three years before. The *Tutanekai*, *Hinemoa*, and *Amokura* were accordingly all declared black by the Union in a move which was (naturally) described in the press as "stabbing our boys in the back".

The jingoistic claim that the participation of the country in

a foreign war made it a "patriotic duty" for all workers to maintain an industrial truce at home, was ruthlessly exploited by every petty profiteer who employed labour. In 1916, the Broken Hill miners in New South Wales, who had been promised a 44 hours week in terms of a pre-war agreement, were told by the mineowners that the "requirements of the war effort" made it impossible! The result was a strike, which was shortly followed by another under similar circumstances in New Zealand by the Petone slaughtermen whose very moderate demands had been similarly rejected "on the pretence of patriotism".

The Seamen's Union issued a call to members for financial assistance to the Australian and Petone strikers — to the horror of Kneen, who dictated from his sickbed a letter declaring that financial help to a striking union was illegal under the I.C. and A. Act, and anyway it was "certainly unpatriotic in present circumstances". Young retorted with a cheerfully irreverent letter to Anderson, insisting that, regardless of war or law, "*where the heart be willing, many things can be done*". He declared that the seamen of Wellington had no intention of forgetting the £1,000 sent them by the Broken Hill miners in 1913, and had consequently sent them £250 to help in their current struggles, as well as £50 to the men at Petone. In an unkind reference to Kneen's illness, Young suggested that he seemed to need "a rattle as well as a feeding-bottle", and added that Kneen's letters "do not disclose the manliness one might expect from a man of his dimensions".

The 1916 Council meetings of the Union heard the Minister of Defence's reply that "seamen could not as a class be exempted from military service", but that they could, after enlisting, apply individually for exemption and be considered on their merits. The Council was highly critical of the decision in view of the general exemption granted to members of the mercantile marine by the British Government, and even proposed in the draft legislation prepared by the Federal Government in Australia (but never enacted, because Conscription was rejected there twice by referendum).

The Australian Seamen's Union adopted an anti-conscription stand at its Council meeting in September 1916, which was attended by a New Zealand delegation including Young and Belcher. The chief interest of the New Zealanders present, however, lay in re-establishing the firm liaison between the two unions which had existed prior to 1913. An agreement

was reached by which the recently founded *Australian Seamen's Journal*, published by the F.S.U. of Australia, would feature a regular New Zealand section publishing any material sent over by the New Zealand Union in return for a minimum New Zealand order of 500 copies a month. This served not only to re-cement relations between the two unions, but to give the New Zealand union a printed mouthpiece which it had lacked since the demise of the *Weekly Herald*. The New Zealand union's desire to benefit from the closest possible contact with its brother organisation across the Tasman (which had been gaining even more advantageous wages and conditions than the New Zealand union during the war years) was undoubtedly serious. A second meeting of the Council of the New Zealand union late in 1916 sent a deputation to the Minister of Labour asking for legislation to permit a single Seamen's Union to represent the seamen of the "whole of Australasia", in view of the growing combination of ship-owners over the region. The Minister promised to "consider" the matter.

The Australian miners' strike was still continuing when this latter conference met, and the Council agreed (against Belcher's sole but vociferous opposition) to accept a request from the UFOL to admit Bob Semple to the meeting to explain the possible lines of action open to New Zealand transport unionists for the assistance of their Broken Hill comrades. As a result, discussions were held with representatives of the miners and watersiders to decide on a joint strategy for preventing coal from being carried from New Zealand to break the strike. Alarmed at the prospect of another stoppage "involving anything from 250 to 300 seamen", Belcher wired the U.S.S.Co. for an assurance that "no coal cargoes would be sent to Australia during the present trouble", and was able to convince the conference that no further action was needed by waving the U.S.S.Co.'s reply: "Under arrangements made by Government with miners' representatives we dispatched *Kaiapoi* from Greymouth to Albany with coal for incoming hospital ship and transport but we have already declined to carry any coal to Australia for commercial purposes and will continue to do so."

In other words, the miners had already obtained the results they wanted from the New Zealand employers without the seamen's help — but Belcher's telegram itself may have been interpreted by the Union Co. as an implied threat of

action, and helped confirm the Co.'s declared intention of keeping its promise.

The greatest achievement of the conference was a joint deputation to the Minister of Defence with the organisations of Marine Officers, Marine Engineers, and Cooks and Stewards, repeating the request for a general exemption of seafarers from military service. Faced by this united front, the Minister finally accepted a proposal that the secretaries of the four maritime employee organisations should be appointed to make application for exemptions of any of their members, and that the Military Service Board "would give effect to these applications".

The UFOL, whose effective membership since the 1913 strike had been restricted to the miners, drivers, and a few others, succeeded in the early war years in re-forming the broken waterside unions under the leading personality of Jim Roberts, who had been an executive member of the Wellington watersiders' union during the 1913 strike. By 1916, the reborn Waterside Workers' Federation was strong enough to invite the Seamen's Union to join a New Zealand Transport Workers' Federation, but the Union remained chary of affiliation with any body connected with the UFOL, although the Wellington branch resolved in favour of such a move. The Transport Federation idea eventually emerged as a Transport Advisory Board, with which the Seamen's Union began to co-operate to its great advantage from 1918, and which ended up by forcing the UFOL itself (somewhat reluctantly) to broaden itself into a new body, the Alliance of Labour, in the following year.

The right wing of the Seamen's Union was being steadily outflanked by events. In 1916, the President of the Auckland Branch, Adam Nixon, was called on by a general meeting of the branch to resign "for doing the employer's work", and the Head Office Executive upheld the decision. Early in 1917, the Dunedin branch's dissatisfaction with the services of Belcher as its secretary came to a head with a request that Young attend a special meeting of the branch and supervise a full investigation into the conduct of the Branch office. Bill Clarke, influential Council member during the 1913 strike and the reorganisation of the Union the following year, had just returned from military service in Europe by way of Australia, where he was persuaded by unionists that he ought to help "clean up the Seamen's Union in Dunedin". Following an

1917
inspection of the office records and the "hopeless" condition of the Branch finances, Belcher was declared incapable of continuing to perform his duties "mainly for health reasons" in August 1917, and was replaced by Clarke — who was to hold the office continuously until 1956. At the insistence of Branch members, Belcher was threatened with prosecution for irregularities, but he was given the alternative of becoming a voluntary patient in a mental hospital. After some months exercising the latter alternative, Bill Belcher took a minor clerical job in the Public Service, and died of cancer in the early 1920s. The same month that he was removed from Union office, John Kneen died. The Seamen's last links with the "Lib-Labs" were finally severed.

The same year, the flat refusal of the shipowners to agree to a longstanding Union claim for the provision of two seamen on all watches on coasters, resulted in a strike which tied up the port of Wellington for a fortnight. Tom Young and the assistant secretary, Frank Howell, were prosecuted under War Emergency Regulations for "inciting a seditious strike", and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

1917 also saw the first major war casualty among New Zealand's merchant fleet, when the U.S.S.Co.'s trader *Wairuna* was captured off the Kermadecs by the German raider *Wolf* shortly after leaving Auckland for San Francisco. After transferring the cargo to their own vessel, and taking the entire crew as prisoners-of-war, the Germans blew up the *Wairuna* in mid-ocean. A few months later the *Port Kembla* was destroyed by a German mine off Cape Foulwind while sailing from Nelson to Westport, and a few months after that another German mine claimed the *Wimmera* not far off Cape Maria Van Diemen with a loss of 26 lives.

A new agreement signed that year gained a further £1 15s increase in the monthly rate of ordinary seamen, an increase in the overtime rate to 2s an hour, besides reductions in normal working hours both at sea and in port to 8 per day. This agreement, like the earlier advantageous agreement of 1915, was the outcome of direct negotiations with the ship-owners, receiving the force of an Arbitration Court Award by legal formality afterwards. The feeling that the usefulness of the Court to the Seamen's Union was purely a matter of formality began to consolidate itself in the Union again with the removal of its last links with the "Lib-Lab" era. There was a strong presentiment that the unresisted advances made

during the war would be placed in considerable jeopardy by the economic dislocation which was expected to follow "the outbreak of peace", and all branches voted in 1917 for the striking of a £1 annual levy on each member for a 5-year period to build up a Fighting Fund to meet "*any future industrial emergency*".

With the benefit of historical hindsight, it is possible to see now that the most important event of 1917 for the Seamen's Union was one of which it took little notice at the time — the purchase of a controlling interest in the U.S.S.Co. by the Peninsular and Orient Line (P. & O.) of London. Even Massey's Minister of Marine, George Russell, was moved to declare:

"It will be a disaster to this country if the control of our shipping passes from us. Sir James Mills has said that the shipping services will probably be increased as a result, and that no change in the management will result. He does not — for he cannot — give any guarantee that our freights and fares will not be increased, and that the people of the Dominion — producers, merchants, and consumers — thus be compelled to pay toll to a leviathan trust in London.

"What has been the experience of the Empire during the war? P. & O. dividends have risen from 5% to 18%! Does that sound like patriotism?

"The people of New Zealand are in favour of the State assuming the place of the P. & O. Co., and the Union Co. becoming a national concern."

If the State had stepped in, as this member of a Tory Government suggested, and nationalised the Union Co. rather than allow it to be taken over by an overseas combine, the New Zealand economy might have been saved millions in overseas funds and the maintenance of trading services and job opportunities during the ensuing half-century. Steadily since 1917 the foreign owners of the U.S.S.Co. have cut services which competed with others in which they had an interest. The result has been a gradual decline in the economic independence of New Zealand as a nation in relation to the external transport of her imports and exports, a constantly shrinking labour market for New Zealand seamen, and a decreasing "economic punch" available to the union which represents them.

The Executive Council decided in 1918 that the time had come for a further move in the direction of consolidating the

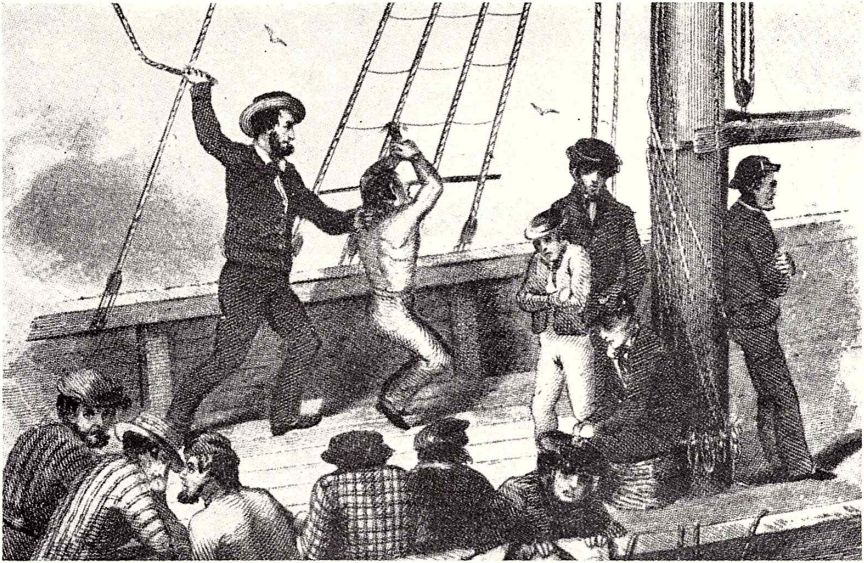
national organisation of the Union by replacing the federal structure of constituent unions with branches of a single national union — significantly described by Young as "*One Big Union of Seamen in New Zealand*". There was a little controversy about this proposal inside the Union at the time, but not much. It is fair to say that it was accepted by most members as a necessary organisational step to counteract the growing centralisation of power among the shipping companies, and an essential prerequisite for any future direct action that was not to lead to devastating defeat. Although the whole notion of a single national union later became confused with the formation of a *separate* union and the arbitrary deregistration from the Arbitration system which Young endeavoured to push through in 1926, it has to be recorded that in 1919 the "One Big Union" idea was firmly approved by the members in a large plebiscite majority. And at that time the move was accepted as a militant and forward-looking one.

Council had also proposed that the Union should affiliate with the UFOL's Transport Advisory Board and the newly formed New Zealand Labour Party, but by the time the Council met again in 1919 the UFOL unions had been absorbed into the Alliance of Labour, and it was to this body that the Union became affiliated industrially, while acknowledging its political loyalty to the NZLP by affiliating to it also. A deputation from the Wellington Trades Council in 1919 tried to dissuade the Union's Council from linking up with the Alliance on the grounds that it would involve a break from the traditional affiliation of the Union's branches to their respective Trades Councils; but the Union Council's response was to carry a resolution instructing its representatives on the Alliance to "urge the widening of the composition of the Alliance to permit of Trades Councils becoming Local Boards of the Alliance".

Signs of increased militancy among the unions were duly noted by the Massey Government, which amended the Arbitration Act in 1918 so as to empower the Court to alter industrial awards *during* the term of their currency, and to adjust wage rates according to the cost of living.

The influence of "Wobbly" syndicalism on the rising tide of militancy in the Union at this time has already been noted. Young himself, whose political position had originally been largely based on the "single tax" theories of Henry George, had followed the changing line of much American radical liter-

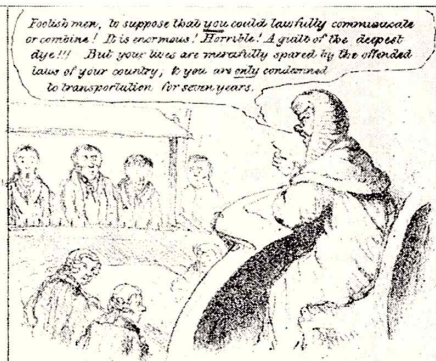
BEFORE UNIONS



FLOGGING was the accepted method of “discipline” aboard ships in the early days of last century. The traditions of life at sea took little regard of human dignity until seamen formed trade unions.
(From a Pictorial History of the American N.M.U.)



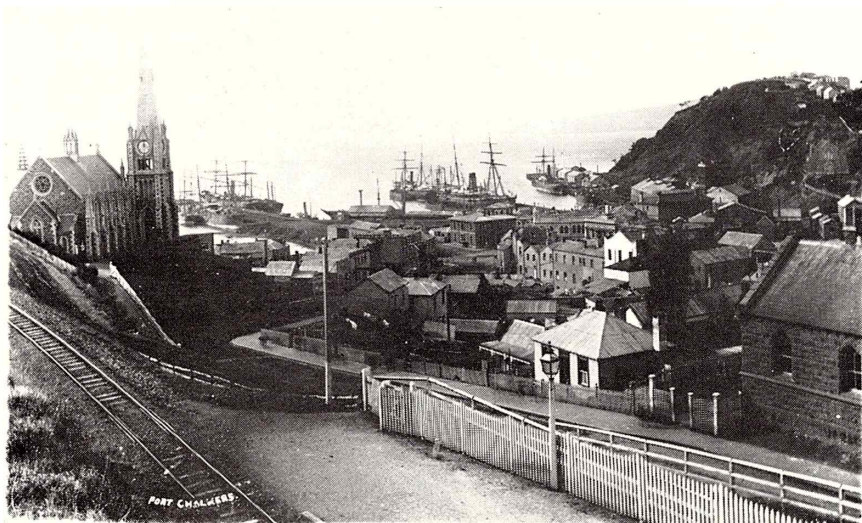
COMBINATION OF LABOURERS.



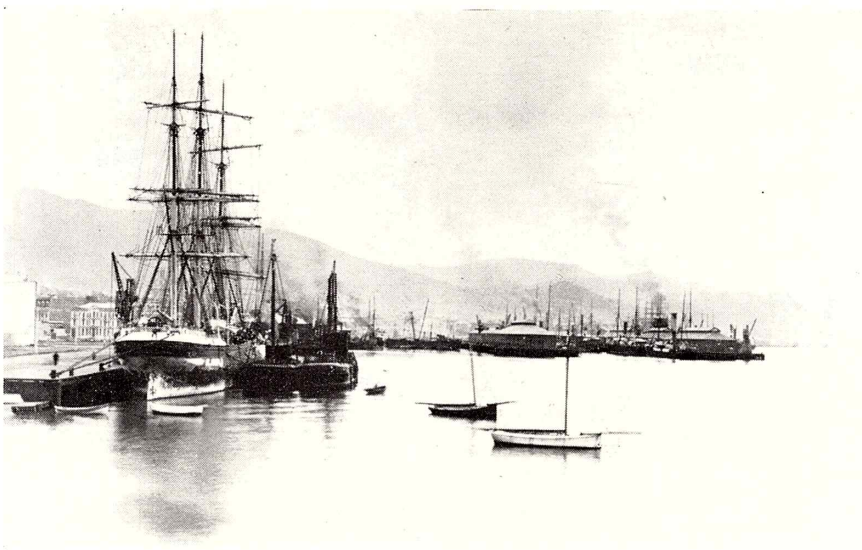
CONSEQUENCES OF THE LABOURERS COMBINATION.

THE LEGAL BATTLE for recognition of the right of workers to “combine” in unions was long and bitter. An English radical cartoonist of the early 1800s satirizes the legal consequences of the determination of the men of Tolpuddle to band together to defend their rights.
(From McLean’s Monthly Caricatures, 1834).

WHEN THE UNION WAS FOUNDED



PORT CHALMERS waterfront looked like this when George Sangster stepped ashore in 1880 to set up a union here as a branch of the Seamen's Union of Australia. (Courtesy Turnbull Library).

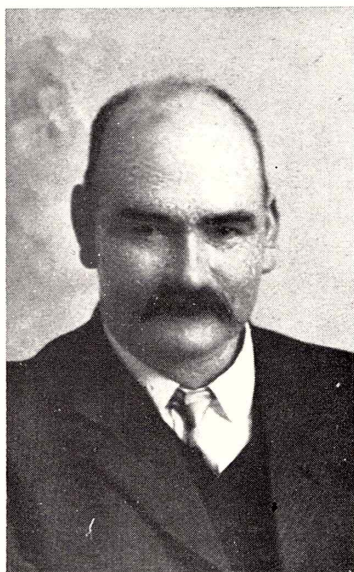


STEAM WAS TAKING OVER FROM SAIL in the port of Wellington when the union was established here in 1880. (Courtesy Turnbull Library).

UNION LEADERS OF THE PAST



JOHN ANDREW MILLAR, General Secretary of the Union, 1887-95; secretary of the Maritime Council 1889-90; Minister of Labour 1906-1912.



WILLIAM BELCHER, General Secretary of the Union, 1895-1912.

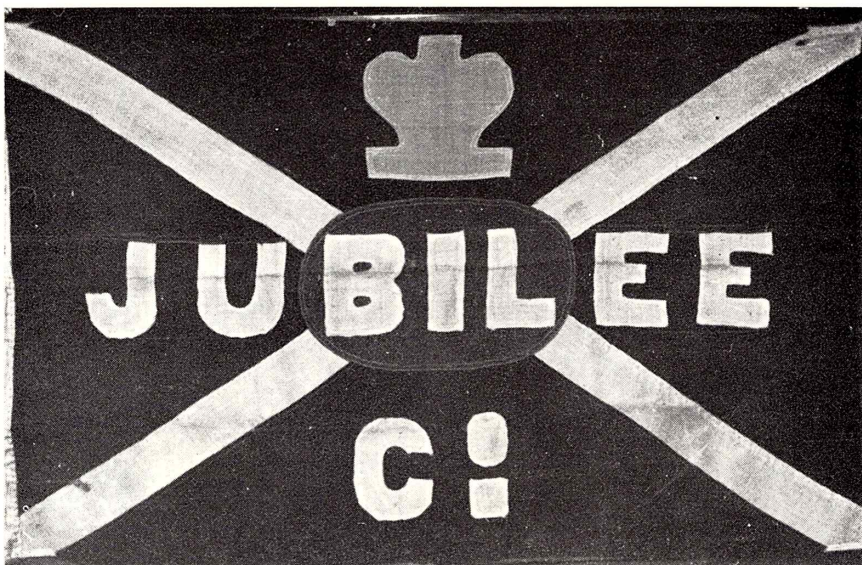


WILLIAM THOMAS YOUNG, Secretary of the Wellington Branch of the Union, 1898-1927; General Secretary 1912-27; President of the United Federation of Labour, 1915.

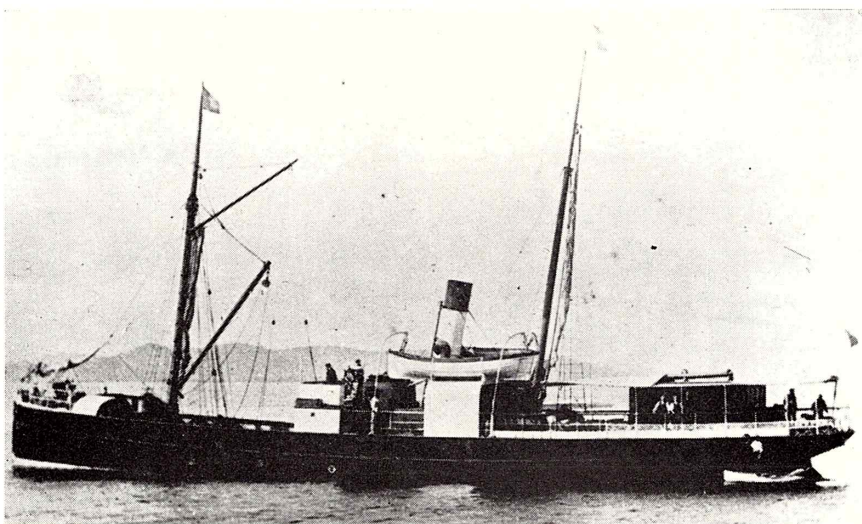


FINTAN PATRICK WALSH, General President of the Union, 1927-65; President of the NZ Federation of Labour, 1953-65.

THE BATTLE WITH THE NORTHERN, 1887

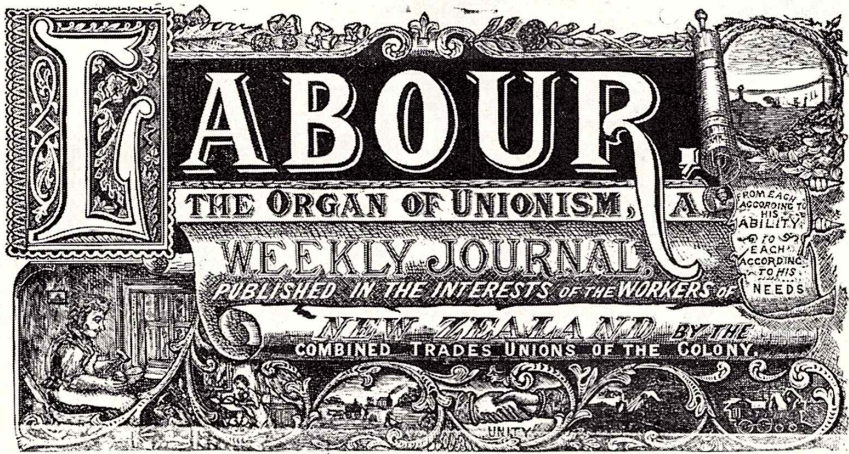


THE FLAG OF THE UNION'S OWN SHIPPING LINE — the Jubilee Steam Ship Company, set up in 1887 to fight the Northern S.S. Co. and force it to pay union rates. The flag is among the archives in the Union's Dunedin office.



THE S.S. BELLINGER, chartered by the Union in Australia to run in competition with Northern Co. ships, and manned and mastered by members of the Union.

THE MARITIME, 1890



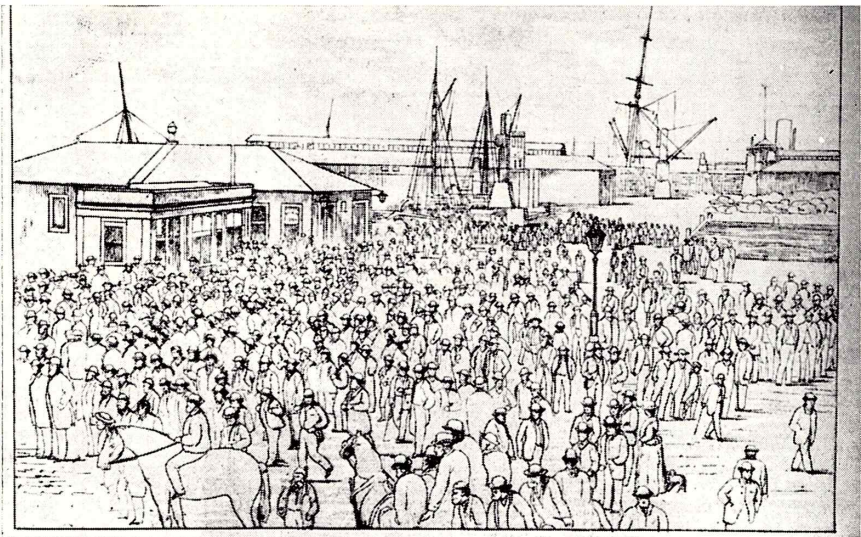
No. 1.

DUNEDIN, N.Z., SATURDAY,

1890.

[PRICE 3d.]

THE LABOUR JOURNAL WHICH NEVER APPEARED — The Maritime Council, New Zealand's first trade union federation formed in 1889 on the initiative of the Seamen's Union, planned to bring out a monthly paper for which this elaborate masthead was designed. The paper, which never got past the "dummy" stage because of the outbreak of the great strike of 1890, carried a significant quotation from Marx.



SCABS SLINK TO WORK at Queen's Wharf in Wellington during the Maritime Strike of 1890, while mounted specials protect them from the jeers of the crowd. (Courtesy Turnbull Library).

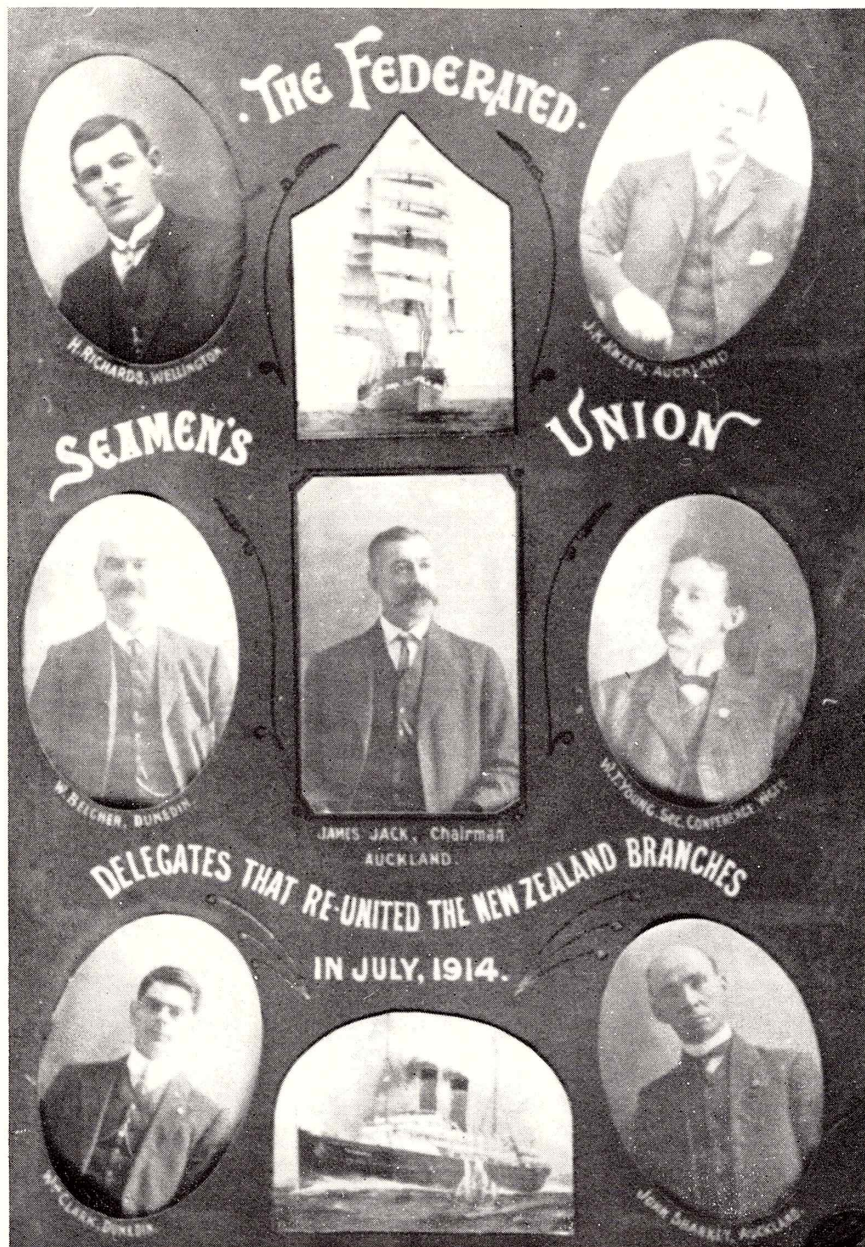


MOUNTED SPECIALS line up to be photographed outside the Wellington Chief Post Office in 1913. They are ready to bludgeon strikers, but are unwittingly leaving behind piles of missiles to be used in mild retaliation. (Courtesy Turnbull Library).



A DEMONSTRATION OF STRIKERS led by watersiders and seamen marches through Auckland streets in 1913. The banner carries a quotation from the poet James Russell Lowell. (Courtesy Turnbull Library).

AFTERMATH OF 1913

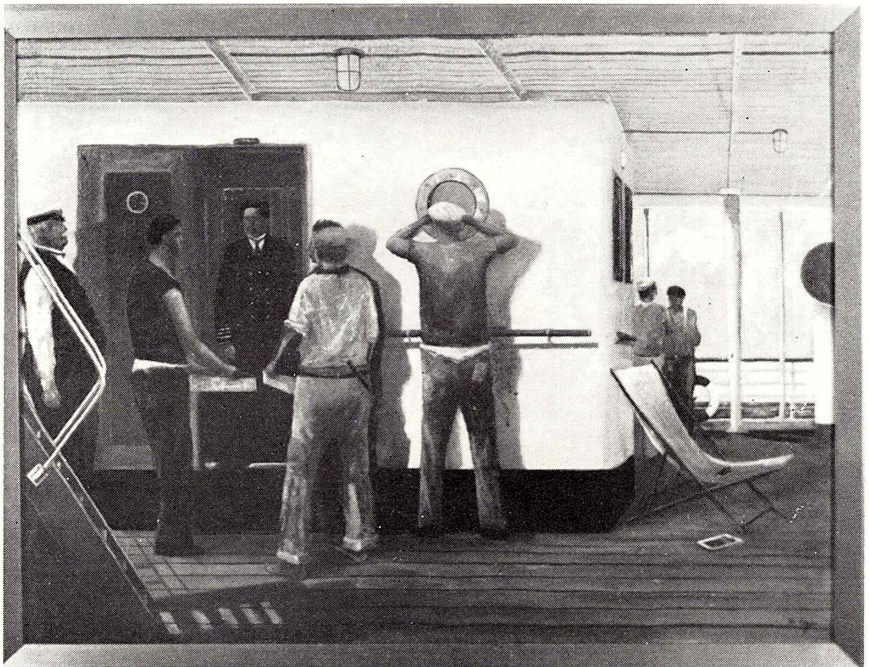


THE UNITY OF THE UNION after the shattering defeat of 1913 was re-cemented at a special conference attended by leaders from all centres. This montage shows Harry Richards, Jack Kneen, Bill Belcher, Jim Jack, Tom Young, Bill Clarke, and John Sharkey, together with ships under sail and steam. It hangs in the Union office in Dunedin.

THE 1920s



THE ALL-POWERFUL FIREMAN — a greatly exaggerated picture of the social significance of the Union and its most militant section of members as seen by a "Truth" cartoonist just after World War I.



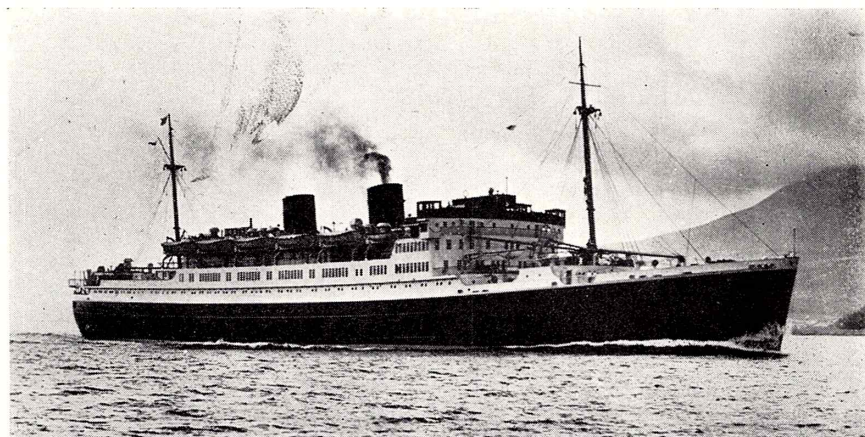
DELEGATES FROM DECK AND STOKEHOLD complain about the food: a typical scene aboard New Zealand vessels in the 1920s, as depicted in an oil painting by an old Union member, the late Bill Tighe, now hanging in the Union's Auckland office.

DEPRESSION AND WAR



DEFENDING JOB OPPORTUNITIES, 1931 — F. P. Walsh leads a demonstration of seamen along the Wellington waterfront to mobilise support in the battle against the invasion of the trans-Tasman trade by the cheap labour ship "Brisbane Maru".

(Photograph from "The Dominion")



COMMISSIONED FOR WAR WORK in 1942, the Trans-Tasman liner "Awatea" was bombed in the Mediterranean with many casualties.

THE SCAB'S LAMENT

In God's name do not
cast me out
Think, Master, do'st
forget
That I betrayed my
friends for thee.
Look, at these imploring
hands. Look ye
The blood, still
warm and wet.

Have I not been thy
willing slave.
Have I not served
thee well.
Did I not drive the sword
hilt deep.
Sire, is this then, the
reward, I reap,
A tortured living
hell.

And now, disowned by
them, and thee
"Oh", Master, heed
my cry.
Stark lies the soul, all
manhood gone.
I lack the courage to
live on
And yet, I fear to
die.



FROM ILLEGAL BULLETINS which circulated during the bitter struggle of 1951: the cartoon above from Wellington depicts an incident during a street demonstration; the verse (illustrated below) indicates what Auckland strikers thought about scabs.

THE 1960s



BANANA BOAT SONG — press cartoonists were hostile in their comments on the role of the Union, the FOL, and Walsh personally in the "African Reefer" dispute, 1962.

(Neville Lodge in "The Evening Post".)



MARCHING TO COURT in Dunedin in 1966 following their historic sit-in, the crew of the "Waihemo" protest against the closing down of the U.S.S.Co.'s trans-Pacific trade, and call for a State-owned shipping line.



THE UNION'S NATIONAL COUNCIL meeting in Wellington in February 1967. Fraternal relations with Australian seamen were shown by the presence of the secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australia, E. V. Elliott. From left, back row: Tom Kelly, Les Barber, Hugh MacRae, Joe Briggs, Terry Adams, Doug Morton; front row: Tom Curphey, Eliot Elliott, Bill Marton, George MacLeod.

ature of the time from Henry Georgeism towards "Wobblyism", and his three months in the Terrace Prison in 1913 had been spent in close company with a number of committed "Wobblies". Bill Clarke was also heavily influenced by the pamphlets and periodicals of the I.W.W., which were being widely circulated in Australia during and just after the First World War. "Wobblyism" slowly became associated, not without good reason, with a brand of way-out sectarian "Ultra-Leftism" which appeared to engage in militant tactics for their own sake: but in the later war and early post-war years there were many "Wobbly" ideas which had a direct and challenging appeal to the best democratic instincts of the working class, and one of these was the need to reduce the gap — in status, income, and social contact — between the workers and their elected leaders. It is significant that one of the unanimous resolutions of the Union's 1919 Council meeting laid down that *"in any future industrial trouble involving the cessation of work by all members of any Local, all salaries of Local Officials should cease from the commencement of the trouble until the stoppage is declared off."* This remains an essential part of the policy of the New Zealand Seamen's Union.

In September 1919, the ever-present issue of safety at sea (or rather the utter lack of safety at sea) was brought forcefully to the headlines again with the sinking of the *Tainui* four miles off the North Canterbury coast on a trip from Lyttelton to Wanganui, with the loss of all her nine crew except one. The Court of Inquiry, at which the Union was vigorously represented by a lawyer later to become Chief Justice, found that the disaster was due to an explosion in a cargo of petroleum, and that the owners had failed to observe the regulations covering the carriage of this commodity at sea, that due care had not been exercised in the stowage, that the ship wasn't safe and suitable for such a cargo, and that the sole lifeboat was too light in construction and had insufficient floor space. The sole survivor was able to testify to this last fact. Initially the entire crew had set out in the boat as soon as it was clear that the conflagration couldn't be doused and the *Tainui* was doomed, but the boat had capsized within minutes of launching, and only the one survivor had been able to cling to the upturned craft long enough to reach the shore.

This tragedy helped solidify opinion in the Union in favour of increasing dependence on militant action. The risks in-

volved in the seagoing life had been persistently discounted by the Arbitration Court as any reason for additional compensation in the way of improved wages or working conditions, and neither arbitration nor cross-table negotiations with the employers had proved of any avail in obtaining the urgently needed improvements in safety and life-saving provisions. Ship-owners were prepared to pay out higher wages when forced to do so by a competitive labour market, but were otherwise determined to operate their ships at the lowest possible cost for the highest possible return. Additional expenditure on equipment for preventing disasters or saving the lives of their mere employees was obviously on the rock-bottom of the ship-owners' agenda; and the public authorities seemed powerless or unwilling to compel the shipowners to take any action on the matter, or even to enforce such safety and loading regulations as existed.

There was one new element in this postwar militancy, and one which became increasingly important during the 1920s, inheriting the mantle of the "red feds" and leaving Young and the militants of the pre-war period very much out on a limb — indeed, eventually discarding them as unceremoniously as they had discarded others before them. This new element was the influence of an educated Marxism. Its initial impetus came from the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 and the consequent formation of Communist Parties in other countries. In New Zealand, it gradually absorbed the older militant tradition of the "wobblies", and soon became a force inside the trade union movement — most conspicuously in the seamen's and miners' unions — of much greater significance than the current membership of any specifically "communist" political grouping would indicate. Its militancy was not of the bull-headed order which advocated direct action as the panacea for all problems: it was rather self-consciously intellectual, constantly relating policies and actions to theories expounded by Marx and Lenin, and looking at every problem in terms of long-term goals for organising and educating the masses. The exponents of this point of view talked the same language of class war that the "Wobblies" talked, but they carefully measured every question of strategy and tactics alongside its possible results, positive or negative.

There was something almost clinical about the approach of these people to the problems of Union struggle, and their attitudes often seemed ludicrous to the masses they sought to in-

fluence. None the less, their influence was enormous because of the gigantic personalities of some of their principal leaders and spokesmen.

Inside the Seamen's Union, this new influence was closely associated with the controversial and colourful personality of Fintan Patrick Walsh, who joined the ranks of the Union on transfer from the Atlantic and Gulf Union of America as a young man of 24 in the year 1920. Son of a Gisborne farmer by the name of Tuohy, Walsh had run away to sea during the war, jumped ship in the United States, and spent several years in that country as an active participant in the left wing of the Labour movement, at first in the I.W.W. in the western states, and later among Marxist groups in Greenwich Village, New York, where he had developed an admiration for such Labour leaders as Big Bill Haywood, Emma Goldman, and Frank Little, and formed close friendships with the famous Tom Mooney and the lesser known Max Gold (who later became prominent in the American Communist Party).

Walsh joined the Seamen's Union immediately on his return from America, intent on applying the lessons he had learned abroad in what he believed to be New Zealand's key industry. Joining the small group of Marxists who formed the New Zealand Communist Party in the following years, he developed attachments with other men of like mind in other industries, such as Angus McLagan, the West Coast miner, and Ken Baxter, a printer from Dunedin, and helped formulate far-reaching schemes for the complete reorganisation of the New Zealand working class. His influence was increasingly felt inside the Seamen's Union during these years, until the point where he was elected to the most prominent position in the Union and held it continuously from 1927 until his death in 1963, operating from this firm basis of power to become the most influential single figure in the New Zealand Labour Movement.

10.

FIGHTING BACK: 1921-1925

Good times or bad times, the wage-earners always seem to get the rough end in a capitalist society. The problem of chronic unemployment had seemed to be "solved" (almost for the first time) in the New Zealand maritime industry by the "boom" conditions that came with the organised slaughter of World War I, and although this meant higher wages as well as steady jobs, the seamen had to accept, as part of the package deal, the new hazards of war at sea.

The "boom" continued briefly into the peace — but even the first feelings of relief at the cessation of hostilities were overshadowed by the "influenza" epidemic which cut a trail of death through the ranks of New Zealand's workers reminiscent of the Great Plagues of centuries gone by. As soon as the epidemic broke out, the Union had proposed the immediate isolation of every ship on which a case of the disease was reported, complete with passengers and crew, but the Government rejected the idea as injurious to the national economy, and the epidemic had continued to get worse before it was finally broken by the intensive self-sacrifice of doctors, nurses, and thousands of unpaid volunteers including many seamen and their families.

The "boom" had lasted long enough to decide the Union to discontinue the Fighting Fund levy after 1920, and at the same time raise Union dues from 6s to 12s a quarter. The same year, a dispute with the Australian union over the right of Australian union members to sign on New Zealand ships under Australian articles resulted in an Australian delegation (led by Tom Walsh, then General Secretary of the Australian Seamen's Union) attending a meeting of the Union's Council in Wellington. It was finally agreed that, pending the winning of uniform conditions, Australian and New Zealand unionists should only sign on each other's ships under whichever articles gave the higher wages and better conditions at the time. For the moment, the advantage in this respect was New Zealand's.

Then, in 1921, the bottom fell out of the "boom" — and the successive shadows of war and plague gave way to the old familiar one of unemployment. In October 1921, for instance, the Union's Lyttelton office reported "a large number of seamen out of work at this port" and entirely without income because of the primitive social security provisions of the day. Some appealed to the Union for hand-outs, and Newfield's shop often served as a doss-house for penniless seamen who would otherwise have had to sleep out in the rain. On fine nights, jobless seamen usually preferred to use the shelter of sheds and haystacks at Governor's Bay. To add to their sufferings and indignities, they were harried by the police to "*get a move on somewhere else*". As the Lyttelton Agent commented: "*These tactics remind one of 1913*".

The 1920 Agreement had increased wages of firemen and greasers by £2 a month, ordinary seamen by 15s, and all others by £1 10s; and it had lifted the overtime rate to 2s. 6d. an hour with an additional 1s. 6d for any hour worked between 5 p.m. and 7 a.m. An additional paid annual holiday was obtained under the name of Seamen's Union Day, to coincide with the Waterside Workers' Union picnic at the nearest port — a symbol of the very close relations developing once more between the seamen and watersiders through the Transport Board, whose monthly journal *The Transport Worker* carried official publicity for the Seamen's Union from its establishment in 1917 until well into the 1920s.

In February 1921, following an Arbitration Court decision granting a 10s. "bonus" to cooks and stewards (in response to an application supported by evidence that the cost of living had risen by £2 a month!) a similar "bonus" was granted to seamen. Provision for "cost of living bonuses" was a make-shift arrangement which avoided lifting the actual wage level when a wage rise was forced by the crazy lurching of the economy. Unlike rises written into the wage structure, these "bonuses" could be obliterated by the Court as soon as economic conditions changed, without a new hearing. The introduction of this system showed clearly enough that the Government and the employers were aware of the temporary nature of the "boom", and served as a warning to the Union to expect harder times.

The Union, as well as its members, had enjoyed something of the prosperity of those years, and greatly extended its service to members — notably with the addition of assistant

secretaries to the paid staff, and the publication of a handbook for ships' delegates with valuable summaries of the current Award as well as legislation governing working conditions, safety at sea, and industrial arbitration, together with useful case notes on recent disputes and tips on how to deal with a wide multiplicity of problems. Entitled *My Shipmate*, and bearing the name of W. T. Young as author, the blue linen-covered handbook had a great educational impact on the members — but far from reducing the organisational work of the full-time officials (as it was probably intended to), it actually increased it by making seamen much more aware of their rights and much more determined to defend them.

The Union was thus in fairly good shape to meet the attack when it came. And it came before the end of 1921, with rising unemployment ("in my opinion, marvellously small compared with what we might have expected", according to the Wellington Employers' Association), and reductions in wages, starting with a 20% cut by the Arbitration Court in the rate for shearers — which prompted the resignation of the workers' member of the Court, J. A. McCullough. The Employers' Federation issued a call for a universal cut in cost-of-living bonuses, and one Labour M.P. commented that "*If the workers are to regain the relative wage positions which they held in 1914 . . . they must insist that the Arbitration Court shall pursue the same 'go-slow' policy on the down-grade as it did on the up-grade*".

A conference of the Alliance of Labour meeting in Wellington shortly after McCullough's resignation carried a resolution moved by the Seamen's Union that all unions should refrain from filling the vacancy on the Court and this was widely interpreted in the press as meaning that "the Alliance of Labour would be glad to use the present situation . . . for the purpose, if possible, of wrecking the Arbitration Act". As it happened, McCullough was replaced on the initiative of some of the old "arbitration unions", but the move was significant of the new mood of the 1920s. The workers had learned from the past what to expect from the arbitration system in keeping their wages lagging well behind rises in prices in "good times", but had regarded the system as at least providing a backstop to protect them in "bad times": now even this negative virtue was proving to be singularly fragile.

The Seamen's Agreement of 1920, as amended by the 1921 "bonus", expired in 1922, and preliminary discussions indi-

cated that no hope was to be expected from cross-table negotiations with the shipowners. The owners fully intended to reduce the wages won by their employees during the war and post-war "boom", and were happy to force the issue to a hearing of the Arbitration Court, which they were confident would be sympathetic to their point of view. There were rumblings inside the Union in favour of ignoring the Court and answering the employers' refusal to talk by direct action, but Young and the rest of the leadership persuaded the majority of members that the legal possibilities should be exhausted before taking extreme measures to ensure the Union the maximum legal and moral justification in any stand it might eventually have to take. Besides, no seaman dreamed just how vindictive the Court was going to be on this occasion.

Young mounted an enormously persuasive case for a wage increase and a number of improvements in working conditions, but in the face of an established fall in the cost of living resulting from the "bust", and a counterclaim by the employers for a wage cut, the case rested almost entirely on the profits of the shipping companies — which had been astronomical during the "boom", and were still unconscionably high.

The Court, however, was empowered to fix wage rates in relation to the cost of living alone, and it gave a summary ruling that all that part of the Union's case concerning company profits was irrelevant and could not be delivered! The new Marxist element in the Union was at this point responsible for supplying an alternative suggestion for publicising the Union's case. In Britain, where a powerful militant upsurge had been making itself felt inside Havelock Wilson's ultra-moderate National Union of Sailors and Firemen, a group of Marxists shortly to be associated with the British Communist Party had recently published an extremely pungent and well-documented pamphlet called *Solidarity Amongst the Shipowners*, which had retailed at twopence and proved a most effective weapon of agitation. Written by a young English university graduate called Walton Newbold (who was later to become the first Communist member of the House of Commons), with a foreword by the veteran dockers' leader Tom Mann, this pamphlet had been brought to New Zealand in large numbers by British seamen and sold widely among their New Zealand colleagues. Young, having a copy of Newbold's pamphlet waved at him at a Union meeting in Wellington, arranged for the swift publication of the whole section of his speech disallowed

by the Court as a pamphlet for free distribution under the title: *Sea Rovers and Their Plunder*. In twenty pages of facts quarried from a wide variety of published sources, this printed bombshell established that the Northern Company had made profits for the last two years that could have supported a 17½% dividend, but had put enormous amounts into reserves; that the P. and O. combine which now owned the U.S.S.Co. had declared an interim dividend of 12% for the previous year; and that the Commonwealth Government Shipping Line, formed to help solve Australia's wartime shipping difficulties by using captured enemy vessels, had (even after notional repayments of capital) made a net profit of over £4 million in five years of operation!

"The employers have come into this Court," declared Young, "and have made financial assertions on and off oath, knowing quite well that the average trade union representative is not in a position to combat them for want of possession of their balance-sheets, and thereby misleading this institution. It is worthy of note that *THERE IS NOT A SINGLE INSTANCE IN THE HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY WHERE THE SHIPOWNER HAS PLACED HIS CARDS ON THE TABLE BY VOLUNTARY PRESENTATION OF HIS BALANCE-SHEETS AND BOOKS*, but by bald statement (which this Court may accept or reject) pleads financial poverty to prevent the wages and conditions of men and women being improved. The plea was made in 1912; again in 1917; and again in 1920; yet the balance-sheets of the Union Company covering these periods disclose the most prosperous of business transactions. . .

"I roughly estimate that the proposals of the shipowners are equal to a reduction in earnings of some £250,000 yearly. Add to that similar proposals affecting other maritime workers, such as officers, engineers, stewards, and waterside workers, and a fair estimate will show that *the shipowners want the Court to take out of the pockets of working men and women something like £2½ million yearly, and place that sum into the pockets of a few wealthy men and women holding shares in various shipping companies — while the unfortunate, struggling worker is kept at starvation point; and to do this, attempts are made to cloud the issue in the eyes of the Court with allegations of drunken firemen, ships held up, stopwork meetings on board ship, and other similar nonsense.*"

The Court remained deaf to this eloquence. In mid-October, it handed down an Award which granted almost the full log of reductions in wages and deterioration in working conditions

demanding by the employers. The monthly rate for ABs was slashed by £1 5s 8d — a heavy blow, but still not completely whittling away the increases won over the “boom”. What caused the greater anger and dismay among the seamen on learning the terms of the new Award was the “slave conditions” it was re-imposing, reversing achievements of thirty and more years past. There was to be a “leading AB” only in ships required by law to carry eight ABs; payments for overtime were cut; the right of repatriation after shipwreck was hemmed in with conditions; the overtime minimum of half-an-hour was abolished; right to refuse overtime in the home port was abolished; overtime payment for watches in port on Sundays and holidays was abolished; the number of “main ports” where extra pay could be earned for certain duties was reduced; the period during which “normal hours” could be worked was extended; the time for unmooring without overtime payment was extended from 15 to 30 minutes; the definition of “safety of the ship” for duty purposes only was extended almost indefinitely; payment of overtime for men on “watch and watch” in port was made virtually discretionary for the employer; extra payment rates for cargo work in surf and boats were halved; the right of seamen to give 24 hours’ notice was limited (quite contrary to the Shipping Act) to their home port; provisions for the cleaning of crews’ quarters were cut; and general manning provisions were reduced. On top of that, the feeble “preference for unionists” clause was abolished altogether. The Union was able to list no fewer than 55 respects in which the Award marked a worsening in working conditions.

Even the press, overwhelmingly hostile to the seamen in their reaction to the Award, gave space to the view expressed by certain “responsible unionists” that the men “might have accepted a reduction in wages, as the cost of living was cheaper”, but that as far as conditions were concerned “there was no single clause in the new Award that favoured the men” and that under these conditions “no sensible man will work”.

Stopwork meetings were held in all centres on Wednesday 25 October 1922 to hear the Court’s decision, and the reaction was massive. According to one account, Young himself addressed the Wellington meeting for 4½ hours in an endeavour to persuade the men to accept the Award so as not to embarrass the Labour Party’s chances in the imminent General Elec-

tions, but in Wellington and all other centres the men resolved almost unanimously to refuse to work under the new conditions. A Wellington resolution, later endorsed by other branches, called for a series of "irritation strikes" of one week's duration to force the employers into negotiations for another agreement — but members were sworn to secrecy about the precise intentions, leaving day-to-day tactics in the hands of the Head Office executive whose directives they bound themselves to obey. All the same, as in 1913, the shipowners and their old pal the Massey Government were in a position to outsmart the Union's tactics. The resources built up by the Union in its Fighting Fund gave it a feeling of confidence, but they proved pitifully inadequate against the bottomless resources of the shipping companies and the State.

That the Union's leaders were expecting the crunch to come some time, but were not expecting it from the Court in 1922, was shown fairly clearly by the Council's decision in September to grant an interest-free loan of £2,000 out of the Fighting Fund to the Australian Seamen's Union. The arrangement was that the money would be repaid when the New Zealand union's need might be greater — but the Council obviously had no notion of how soon that was to be, still less how long it would be before the money was finally returned (in 1951)!

The first walk-off of men from the ships began in Auckland on 31st October, the day before the Award was to take effect. By 8 November, four ships were held up at Lyttelton. On 10 November, following meetings in all centres, all members currently in employment gave 24 hours' notice — and though they insisted that they were each acting individually, it added up (of course) to a total stoppage. The Shipowners' Federation, after declining an offer by the Union to negotiate a universal resumption of work on the basis of a return to the 1920 Agreement as being "a blow at the whole arbitration system", issued a statement denouncing the stoppage as "a strike against society rather than against the employers". The *Evening Post* described the seamen as "inexpressibly foolish. . . In attacking the Court they are stabbing a friend in the back at the very time when they are most in need of that friend." The *Hawke's Bay Herald-Tribune* declared the stoppage to be "a deep-laid plot".

By 14 November, the Government had complied with a request from the shipowners to suspend the "restricting clauses

of the Shipping and Seamen Act . . . to enable companies to employ non-union labour and smaller crews". Immediately the Union printed and distributed pamphlets attacking the Government for allowing the shipowners to "further increase their profits by allowing vessels to go to sea with inadequate and incompetent labour and so endanger the lives of innocent women and children", and recalling the £2,393,000 paid to the U.S.S.Co. by the taxpayers of New Zealand for the charter of troopships during the war "while the seamen of New Zealand were running the risk of getting torpedoed by German submarines. . . Oh, 'Patriotism', what crimes are committed in thy name!"

Scab labour was recruited at once, and the pressure of unemployment enabled a scab crew to be got together to take the *Mararoa* from Wellington to Lyttelton within 12 hours of the Shipping Act's suspension. "A fair number of strikers" was reported to be among the crowd that watched the vessel depart, but there were "no untoward incidents" and the strikers' comments were "more jocular than serious". At this stage, they had good reason to be jocular. The *Mararoa* reached Lyttelton well behind schedule, being (according to a press report) "delayed considerably by the inexperience of the 'scratch' crew, one or two of whom were sick".

Watersiders refused to handle goods to or from scab-manned ships, but many other workers were involved quite unwillingly. Master carriers and warehouse proprietors began "laying off" employees to swell the unemployed ranks as the stoppage slowed up the flow of goods, and the shipping companies opened up "Free Labour Bureaus" in the main ports to enrol scabs. The cooks and stewards, paid off when seamen left their ships, had their jobs filled with scabs without even being consulted on whether they would work with scab crews or not. A special conference of the Alliance of Labour was summoned, and the Seamen's Union Council was in almost continuous session, while the rank and file, besides attending general meetings daily, maintained pickets at the "Labour Bureaus". "We know the men who are signing on," a Union spokesman was quoted as saying in the press — and indeed an accurate Scab Register was kept on this occasion from an early stage with amazing efficiency.

Leaflet appeals were distributed with great speed among the scab crews. One cyclostyled sheet appealed:

"Workers on Shipboard —

THINK! THINK! THINK!

What Are You Doing?

"You are just everyday workingmen struggling for an existence. . .

"In 1922, the shipowners of New Zealand made a strong attempt to reduce the earnings of seamen and waterside workers by some £2½ million per annum. . . Every reduction in the earnings of workers takes bread from the mouths of the mother and the child. . .

"Your presence on board ship is helping the shipowner to carry out these reductions — at YOUR final expense! . . [The strike] is a practical protest as much in YOUR interest as our own . . . You are killing yourselves as workers. Your turn will be sure to come later if the shipping magnates accomplish their desired ends. . .

"The injury you do to the organised seamen is in reality an injury to yourselves and to all working men and women. Remember: YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO LEAVE YOUR JOB AT THE PORT WHERE YOU SIGNED ON AT ANY TIME ON GIVING 24 HOURS' NOTICE."

By 16 November, many watersiders around the country had ceased work altogether rather than work with scab crews, and the wharves were reported to have "a rather idle appearance". Blockades were erected near wharf gates as a precaution, and large posses of police were on duty: clearly the Government was prepared for a repetition of the events of ten years earlier. The Seamen's Union made it plain that it had not requested the help of the watersiders and that it "considered that it would be more helpful to its members if the watersiders remained at work", including work on cargo in scab snips, and within a week of the commencement of the stoppage most watersiders were back at work on instructions from their own organisation in consultation with the Seamen's Union. Still, despite pamphlet publicity, the Union refused to make any statements to the press.

Then, on 20 November, in a move that surprised the public but was in accordance with the Union's pre-arranged strategy, seamen offered themselves for work *en masse*, but were turned away. "*From here on, this a lock-out,*" declared Young, and the Shipowners' Federation virtually acknowledged the fact by declaring that no Union members would be re-employ-

ed until the Union Executive gave "some sort of guarantee that the Award of the Arbitration Court will be accepted in its entirety and observed without obstruction". Obviously, although the Union had made no approach to the employers nor any sort of public declaration, the employers were intent on forcing it to accept legal responsibility as a body for the stoppage, and to exact from it conditions for the re-engagement of its members: but the Union declined to be shoved. "No comment. Tight as an oyster," chuckled Young to a reporter as he emerged from a general meeting of Wellington members.

The general election campaign was in full flow by now, and the seamen's stoppage had become a hot issue, with Government candidates denouncing the seamen for "trying to wreck the national economy", and Labour candidates blaming the Government for preventing the Arbitration Court from taking employers' profits into account and restricting its discretion in such a way that "the workers MUST get a decrease in wages". The Labour Party's strength in Parliament, which had grown since the war with the election of Fraser, Semple and Holland at by-elections in 1918, was certainly not adversely affected by the seamen's strike. Harry Holland had been elected Leader, within weeks of winning a seat, after Hindmarsh, died in the influenza epidemic, and his vigorous leadership, together with the steadily deepening depression, had given the Labour cause a skyrocketing popularity which was evidently helped rather than hindered by an outburst of discontent from an essential group of exploited workers. The 1922 elections more than doubled Labour's share of the seats in Parliament from 8 to 17!

Meanwhile, crews of New Zealand ships in Australian ports obeying the strike call had been jailed in terms of Australia's much harsher shipping legislation, but after 20 November they began to be released to resume their jobs with guarantees of no victimisation only to be sacked and replaced by scabs on return to New Zealand. Other maritime organisations urged the Government to restore the Shipping Act and help the regular seamen back into employment. Even the Marine Engineers Institute demanded the urgent removal of the Act's suspension, an official declaring: "*Our members have a pretty rough time when they have incompetent men in the stokehold*". The prevalence of unemployment brought a steady supply of these incompetents, and the employers were quite determined to keep them on as long as necessary to force the qualified

crews back under the new Award with "ironbound guarantees" against future stoppages —at which point they would be quite content to let the Massey Government restore the Shipping Act and throw the incompetents back on the compost heap.

On 24 November, the Government started following in the footsteps of the Australian Government by prosecuting seamen throughout New Zealand for taking part in a strike contrary to the terms of the I.C. and A. Act. The Union's executive council resumed its meetings in Wellington that day, and took up the shipowners' demand for an undertaking to accept the new Award and observe its terms without further hold-ups. They replied: "You are incorrect in surmising that the members of this federation have refused to work under the Award. . . . They offered their services under the Award on 20th instant only to receive the intimation that they were not wanted." The Shipowners' Federation replied that it was a matter of common knowledge that the members of the Unions had "left their ships following the holding of stopwork meetings", and the Union could not escape the responsibility for the concerted action of its members; but when the owners pressed the Union Council to meet them in order to discuss "assurances", they received no reply. The Union's Council closed its meeting on 29 November without further action, and the councillors dispersed to the various ports.

By now, 60 ships were being run on the coast with scab crews, and the Union's Fighting Fund of £12,000 was already greatly diminished by sustenance payments to members at the rate of £2 10s a week for married men and £1 10s for single men, plus weekly rations of tobacco. A sizeable sampling of members in each port had been charged with being party to an "illegal strike", and the cases were set down for hearing within ten days: but the spirit of the men was unbroken.

On 5 December, 36 union members (including one Paddy Walsh) appeared in the Wellington Magistrate's Court to answer the "illegal strike" charges, each facing a possible fine of £10. The case of one man (Manson) was by agreement heard as a test. Young was subpoenaed as a Crown witness in an endeavour to establish that the stoppage had been the result of a Union decision, but he wasn't much help. His studied evasions maintained a light-hearted spirit in the proceedings, and although he was acting in accordance with a Union decision, he was afterwards accused together with other Union leaders of treating "the serious question of the liveli-

hood of the members with undue levity". Asked if Manson was a member of the Union, Young said he didn't know and it might take a long time to find out by reference to the records. Asked if he had seen the Arbitration Court's recent Award for seamen, he answered: "Yes, unfortunately"; and when probed on the question of what precise business was transacted at the stopwork meeting on 10 November, he said he couldn't say, he didn't have a very good memory for details. The Master of the *Wainui*, however, claimed that Manson and all other crew members giving notice on 10 November had said they were stopping work as a result of a decision taken at that meeting. The Magistrate held that a strike had been proved on the facts, and convicted all the accused and fined them £2 each. Similar fines were imposed on 57 men in Auckland and 47 in Christchurch, and 100 Grey miners were prosecuted under the same clause for holding a stopwork meeting to discuss the seamen's dispute.

After debate, it was decided that the Union's valuable funds should not be used "to oil the wheels of class justice", and that in any case there was more publicity to be made out of accepting the alternative of jail sentences "which might even save some members a few bob in board". So the convicted men were marched off to spend some days as His Majesty's guests.

The Union's Executive Council met again on 9 December, and engaged in an exchange of letters with the Shipowners' Federation which finally led to a meeting between them on 20 December. The Councillors managed to argue out the question of "assurances" concerning future hold-ups by asking if the owners would give similar "assurances" concerning future lock-outs. Finally agreement was reached on all points except one: the owners insisted that they were "morally obliged" to keep on those scabs who were "qualified seamen", and on this point the talks broke down.

Increasingly, the Councillors felt the sting of criticism from the rank and file that they had been led into an impossible position. Young, in particular, was attacked at general meetings for maintaining a "false optimism" and for not having negotiated a return to work "before the scabs got entrenched". The Councillors finally decided to disperse to their Branches and put to general meetings the question: "Shall we return to work with 'qualified' scabs still on the ships?" The result was a fairly resounding "No", but it was noticeable that the fig-

ure for abstentions from voting at the meetings was very high; and an increasing note of dissent was heard — not, as might have been expected, from the old “right wing” of the Union, but from the young “left wing” . . .

The Marxist group, realising that the strike was leading nowhere, and that the longer it went on the more scabs would become “qualified” by three months experience in terms of the Act, saw that it was urgent to get the members back to work on whatever terms could be negotiated before the Union was smashed as the watersiders had been in 1913. Walsh spoke vigorously at a Wellington meeting for this course of action. “I take second place to none in my stand for militant unionism,” he declared, “*but it’s not militant to rush unarmed at the cannon’s mouth. It’s bloody mad.* We can’t let the shock troops of the New Zealand trade union movement be sacrificed on the altar of our leaders’ pride. Let Tom Young swallow his pride and lead the troops back in order — before they’re scattered to the winds like they were in 1890 and damn nearly were in 1913. Let Tom Young do that — or let him get the hell out of it and make room for someone who will.”

Public debate raged on over the suspension of the Shipping Act. Under its suspension, scabs were able to be taken on without any qualifications or experience whatever — but if the Act were not restored soon, the Union would be confronted with “qualified” scab crews usurping the places of its members permanently, and the Union would be “doomed with the moa”. The Union stepped up its campaign on the issue. One Union leaflet took the form of an Open Letter to the Minister of Marine (G. J. Anderson), accusing him of putting the shipowners’ “scramble for dividends” before the safety and welfare of the public. The message was effective enough to provoke heated replies from both the Shipowners’ Federation and the Minister — but their replies were in such similar terms that the Union was able to use them as evidence of collusion. The Government, declared the Union, was obviously acting “at the special behest of the shipping corporations”. The Union challenged the Minister to tell the public how many of the scabs would be capable of launching a lifeboat, and offered £100 to the Wellington Hospital if a board consisting of the Superintendent of Marine and one representative each from the Union and the Shipowners’ Federation found on in-

vestigation that more than 25% of the scab crews were competent seamen. Neither challenge was taken up.

By 29 December, the depleted state of the Fighting Fund prompted the Council to reduce single men's weekly allowances to £1 and married men's to £1 10s plus 2s 6d for each of up to 4 children under 16. Resumed discussions with the shipowners the same day had no results, and the Alliance of Labour executive met early in January and discussed with the Seamen's Union the advisability of various forms of assistance including a general strike. At a general meeting of Wellington members on 5 January, Walsh suggested that, as a matter of urgency, the Union had to come to terms with the owners on the "qualified" scabs issue, and "after getting back on the ships, make matters so unpleasant for the scabs that they will be glad to get out". The view was still not accepted, but it leaked to the press as being the opinion of "a section of members", and the *Evening Post* explained that "this is what is known in the militant Labour world as 'white-anting', and is resorted to sometimes (though not always) with success".

Young boasted to the press on 9 January 1923 that the men were "quite happy and contented" and "capable of holding out indefinitely". The same day the City Council granted a permit to the Union to publicise its case by a march through Wellington streets culminating with speeches in Post Office Square — but it was vetoed by a Police Inspector, acting (as the Union declared) "*not so much in the interests of the traffic of the city as in the interests of the shipowners*". The Inspector's own explanation was that "street processions sometimes cause trouble".

The press, by this stage, was prepared to print any statement from the Union — which had kept "mum" for so long — and Young managed to get printed throughout the country his declaration that

"The shipping companies of New Zealand are part of the greatest shipping octopus the world has yet seen, and one of which the farmers and others in the Dominion will have practical experience before long. . . The seamen's organisation and the Labour movement support strongly the aim of the farmers to have a State-owned shipping line to transport their produce".

On 10 January, Prime Minister Massey and the Minister of Marine received a deputation from the Seamen's Union, the Alliance of Labour, and the Labour Party, requesting the re-

storation of the Shipping Act, but to no avail. A week later, general meetings of the Union were discussing the alternatives of calling off the dispute and letting the men get back to work on the best terms they could, or handing it over to the Alliance of Labour which was currently conducting a ballot of affiliates on action to oppose wage reductions generally. The argument began to gain ground that the seamen would be in a better position to fight for restoration of the old Award when the new Award expired in September 1923 if they returned to work as soon as possible. By 19 January, the Union Council was asking the Prime Minister to arbitrate, and on 22 January the Union announced that its members would return to work at 8 a.m. the next day as the Government had undertaken to restore the Shipping Act immediately. The Prime Minister announced simultaneously that the Union had given an assurance that its members would accept the new Award and would "work with the men now employed on the ships" — but, as the press was not slow to point out, by returning before 11 February, the Union had decreased the chances of some of the scab trimmers becoming "qualified" at all. A Lyttelton seaman was quoted as saying that "it would be perhaps 3 to 4 months before the 'free' labourers were worked out of the ships".

The papers of the next few weeks reported several incidents involving clashes between unionists and scabs. Five days after the Shipping Act had been restored, Bill Clarke issued a statement from Dunedin complaining that ships were still setting sail with unqualified crews, and demanding to know whether the Prime Minister had failed to honour a solemn undertaking, or whether the Marine Department was winking at the flagrant violation of the law by the shipowners. The Minister of Marine replied that legally the unqualified crews could be employed until their ship's next call at the port where they had signed on — an opinion vigorously challenged by the Union. The secretary of the Alliance of Labour (Big Jim Roberts) announced a resolution of its conference declaring that there was no justification for the continued employment of unqualified crews when qualified men were available, and deploring the fact that no boat drills had been given to scab crews, which seemed to indicate that safety of lives and property were "of small importance to the shipowners".

It wasn't long before the exodus of the scabs from the ships developed to the proportions of a stampede. The Employers' Federation complained in its *Industrial Bulletin*:

"The unionists can make the lot of a non-unionist in their midst well-nigh insupportable. . . . If incidents . . . are not promptly and strictly dealt with, the promise of the owners to the non-unionists will not be worth the paper it is written on."

But incidents were not always easy to deal with, promptly, strictly, or any other way. In at least one case, a scab completely disappeared from a ship during a trip from New Zealand to Australia, and the Sydney police detained a number of unionists among the crew (including F. P. Walsh) for the maximum period for questioning without bringing a charge, but were finally compelled to let them go for total lack of evidence.

Within a few months, the New Zealand Letter in the *Australasian Seamen's Journal* was reporting that the remaining scabs were "*gradually going by the board. The non-unionist was only useful while he allowed himself to be used as the medium through which the wives and children of the bona fide seamen could be robbed. . . . The shipowners have not treated them too generously. They did not even get the miserable doles provided for in the Award.*" By December, the same source reported that "Unremitting effort on the part of members over the past nine months has resulted in the cleaning out of the majority of ships."

The Australian Seamen's Union, which had been involved in a dispute of its own at the time, had still stood loyally by the New Zealand union throughout the strike. The principal Australian contribution was a boycott of U.S.S.Co. ships, but this was discontinued after the Seamen's Union saw that it was merely serving to "entrench another lot of scabs". After that, there was talk of financial assistance (and primarily of returning the £2,000 loaned to the Australian union earlier in the year), but by this time the end was in sight and it was not pursued. Offers of financial help did, however, come from other Australian unions, chiefly the miners, but none of them were called upon.

There was much bitterness over the fact that other overseas organisations — especially Havelock Wilson's union in Britain — had flatly refused any help. Wilson's journal *The Seaman* had, indeed, gone further than refusing to help the New Zealand seamen: it had given publicity to the employers' case against them! Without acknowledgement of the source, it had reprinted a violently distorted account of the dispute from

the pages of a Liverpool business magazine, which reported at length the shipowners' arguments in favour of a wage cut leading to the 1922 Award, and dismissed the Union case as "quibbles"!

Within the Union, also, the strike left its legacy of unforgiving resentments. Young, who had not been keen on the strike in the first place, had nevertheless led it willingly enough when the members voted for it, and appeared so exhilarated by his role that he refused to accept the growing sentiment in favour of a realistic return to work until the last possible moment. Indeed, he began to regard any criticism of his leadership as a personal affront, and when the final settlement was negotiated against his violent opposition, he accused his opponents of a "conspiracy" to undermine him. Some of his press statements at the conclusion of the strike had an almost paranoid flavour, with much insistence that "the meeting concluded with three cheers for Tom Young" and "a vote of confidence was passed in Tom Young's leadership".

In fact, serious doubts had been cast on his abilities both as a strategist and as a tactician, and there was widespread talk of how "it was all very well for Tom Young to accept the same sustenance allowance as the rest of us — him with a restaurant business at the back of him". And before the strike finished, serious charges were laid against his competence which his most ardent supporters had to tell him: "can't be answered with bluster".

The Union's annual elections were due in March 1923, and another member, A. H. Chard, was nominated for the position of General Secretary against Young. Chard had been associated with the Assistant Secretary, Frank Howell, in making certain allegations impugning Young's leadership in the latter stages of the strike, and the election campaign took the form of a bitter exchange of circulars issued in their own names by the two candidates. Some of the allegations and counter-allegations were extremely serious, and Chard ended up by suing Young for libel, but before this dénouement a general meeting of members in Wellington set up a Commission of Inquiry of rank and file members (including the respected Richards and the very junior Walsh) to investigate the basis of the acrimony and endeavour to end the disruptive disunity in the Union.

The report of this Commission, which included a number of Young's strongest partisans, was by no means favourable to

Young. It concluded that he had failed to clear himself of a charge of defalcating at least £250 of Union funds by refusing to allow the Commission perusal of his personal Bank statements — which led the Commission to assume that they contained “some transaction . . . that he wishes to hide from the members of this organisation”. The Commission also found Young “negligent” in his custody of amounts raised by members for a special fund organised by the *Maoriland Worker* to help the legal expenses of the great Irish labour leader Jim Larkin in his battle for justice, and in not having the Levy Account audited; and condemned him for arrogance in raking over the long-dead ashes of the Jones disruption to find dirt to throw at Chard (who had been an executive member of Jones’s Union in its early years), and in his dictatorial relations with Howell as Assistant Secretary.

Young, as the best known leader the Union had, was nevertheless elected General Secretary again, but the narrowness of his majority gave him cause to think. His moral command was seriously eroded, and a large faction of members was quietly preparing an alternative policy for the Union — and an alternative leadership as well.

When the 1922 Award expired in September 1923, the Union had not recovered enough strength to offer serious resistance to its extension for a further year, but the owners were prepared to concede certain points that meant no immediate monetary pay-out. For one thing, they conceded a long-standing demand that all crew members not essential on board ships in the four main ports could attend *a monthly stopwork meeting in normal working hours*. This was historic, as it was the first time such a concession was made in any industry in New Zealand.

By 1924 a strong case was able to be mounted in the Court, and all wage rates were raised, though only by the paltry sum of 3s 4d a month. A clause was also written into the 1924 Award giving permanent effect to the “assurance” sought by the employers after the 1922-23 strike: it bound the Union not to “order, encourage, aid or abet any strike or job control” during the term of the Award, and defined the expression “job control” as meaning “any attempt by the members of the Union, or any of them, to enforce industrial conditions other than those prescribed by the Court or by the Shipping and Seamen Act or any competent authority thereunder, either by refusing to offer for or accept work on any particular vessel

or vessels or by refusing or failing to carry out the work on any particular vessel or vessels or by any other methods other than those provided by the I.C. and A. Act or by the methods of ordinary negotiation."

Some of the other conditions lost in the 1922 Award, however, were restored, including a pallid version of "preference for unionists", which required employers to dismiss non-unionists at the Union's request if they were not received into the Union within 14 days of employment, "provided there is then a member of the Union whose record is good and who is equally qualified to perform the particular work required to be done and ready and willing to undertake same."

A rank-and file member sent an account of the hearing resulting in this Award to the *Australasian Seamen's Journal*, describing the judge as "a fine-looking chap in a big wig, seemingly well massaged and manicured and fed. . . . Anyone but a lunatic would surely have thought, 'here is a man whose sympathies will almost inevitably be with the silk hat class as against the rough-necks; a man who probably thinks that the worker commits a great sin when he refuses to labour truly and do his duty in that station of life to which it has pleased God to call him.'" He went on to draw pen-pictures of the representatives of the two parties, one "with every advantage of education and training", the other "probably superior in intellect, certainly superior in principles, to their opponents, but too honest to get far in a Court. . . . How could the workers get a fair deal in a Court like this?"

Inside the Union, Young's leadership continued to be called into question. To some extent, the thoughtful militants who were challenging his policies made tactical use of old resentments against Young which were shared by members much less militant than themselves, but there was never much doubt that the opposition developing against the ageing helmsman was led by the youthful Walsh, and was Marxist in its orientation.

Internal squabbling among the officials burst into the open again before the 1924 Union elections, with another exchange of leaflets, this time between Howell and J. H. Adams, who had held the honorary post of General President but was challenging Howell for the paid post of Assistant Secretary in the Wellington office. The substance of the dispute still concerned the integrity of Young, and it was made clear that doubts raised during the previous year had still not been cleared up.

Nor had they been cleared up in February 1925, when the *Australasian Seamen's Journal* carried the following (under "Answers to Correspondents"): "F. P. WALSH, Wellington, N.Z.: You surely do not expect the *Seamen's Journal* to publish statements such as you make in your letter."

The Union waged a major campaign in 1924, chiefly through its affiliation with the Labour Party and consequent influence over Labour members in Parliament, to have the Shipping and Seamen Act amended so as to remove the provision by which the Minister of Marine, on his sole say-so, could suspend "the whole or any portion" of the shipping laws. The experiences of 1913 and 1922-23 had proved just how crucial this provision was to the shipowners in beating their mutinous wage-slaves. The Union's Council saw the link with the Labour politicians as useful chiefly to publicise such grievances and bring pressure for reform. An extensive statement was prepared for use by the Labour Party, pointing out that no such provision had existed before 1909; that it was a result of the decision of the Colonial Maritime Conference in London (which Belcher had attended) in 1907 to bring the Dominion's shipping laws into line with Britain's; but that, in fact, New Zealand's provision was much more extreme and dictatorial than either Britain's (where the power was vested in the Board of Trade) or Australia's (where it belonged to a Marine Council which included representatives of all the maritime unions); and that in any case the British and Australian provisions had *never been used* in any of the many industrial disturbances which had affected the maritime industries of those countries.

Other changes to the Act sought by the Union included an amendment obliging owners of all ships trading between or with New Zealand ports to pay their crews no less than New Zealand Award rates; engagement of crews by the Government Shipping Office instead of by ships' masters; improvement in the manning scale; and the heating of crews' quarters. But apart from increasing the popularity of the Labour Party, the campaign had little effect.

In accordance with a Council decision ratified by stopwork meetings in all centres following the strike in 1923, a ballot of members was held in 1924 on the cancellation of the Union's registration under the I.C. and A. Act. The arbitration system had become an object of universal hatred among the workers, not just as "labour's leg-iron" holding them back

from winning better conditions, but as the employers' thumb-screw for effecting actual reductions in wages and conditions. Still, the influence of that long-sighted group of Marxists in the Union was steadily growing, and they (unlike so many self-proclaimed Marxists) were so far from proclaiming the doctrinaire version of the class war associated with the older militants, that they started pointing out the positive advantages which continued registration under the arbitration system might have during a period when the Union was not strong enough to engage in any successful direct action anyway. Their message made sense to those who remembered the long uphill haul after 1890 and again after 1913, when the system, despite its glaring and admitted faults, gave the workers more protection than they would have had without it. *"Sure arbitration's rotten,"* argued Walsh, *"and so is capitalism: but it's a question of having to live with the one the same as the other, till we're in a tactical position to do without it."*

The result was that, although a majority of votes were cast for deregistration, only a minority of the membership voted at all. Many members hated the arbitration system too much to vote for it, but they were not prepared in present circumstances to vote against it. The Council wisely considered the vote "indecisive", and decided in 1925 to hold a second ballot on the same question to see if there was any firmer consensus of opinion. The "consolidation" move to form "One Big Union" was also postponed pending the result of this second ballot.

The predominant shade of political opinion in the Union at this time can be sensed from a resolution of an Auckland stop-work meeting in August 1925, endorsed by the Council a few weeks later, declaring "emphatic hostility" to the visit of the United States Pacific Fleet to Auckland during manoeuvres. The preamble to the resolution underpinned it with the view that *"ships of war and all forms of militarism are instruments of capitalism used in the destruction of human life in war and on behalf of the employing class against the working class in times of industrial conflict"*, and an addendum called on the Labour Party to "demand the release of American class prisoners and the withdrawal of the capitalist powers at present murdering and plundering the working class of China". This was a far cry from Belcher's unsubtle racism — and yet the wording indicates a sentimental rather than an ideological approach to the question of international class solidarity.

The political events of 1925 — the return of the Reform Government (following Massey's death in office) with an increased majority under Coates, and the reduction of Labour's Parliamentary strength to 12 — indicated an ebb in the post-war radical tide. Unemployment, still a real problem, had lessened considerably, and the brassy values of Coates's slogan "More Business in Government, Less Government in Business", pushed to the limit in a well-financed publicity campaign, had its impact on a population beginning to enjoy the fringes of the short-lived prosperity of the 1920s.

Australian seamen's rates at this stage were 25s a month higher than their New Zealand colleagues were getting, and several hold-ups occurred when attempts were made to fill vacancies on New Zealand ships in Australian ports with non-unionists at New Zealand rates — despite the established rule that men engaged on New Zealand ships at overseas ports had to receive whichever rate (their own or New Zealand's) was the higher. New Zealand crews on the *Koromiko* in Sydney late in 1924, and on the *Moeraki* in Melbourne early in 1925, insisted that vacancies must be filled with unemployed members of the Australian union at their own rate and on their own conditions. On the *Koromiko*, two New Zealanders had been invalided off with anthrax, and the Master "managed to secure two nameless creatures to agree to engage at N.Z. rates". The crew refused to sail with them. At first arrested and charged with "disobeying lawful commands", the whole crew organised an imaginative publicity campaign from their prison cells, concentrating on the dangers of anthrax and the fact that although the lady at whose house the two victims had been staying in Sydney had been required to have her house fumigated and bedding burned, the only action taken on board the ship was "the burning of one shaving-brush". The employers' image was taking a denting, and it was hardly surprising that, the day before the case was due to be heard, the Captain agreed to discharge the two scabs and apply to the Australian Seamen's Union for two qualified seamen, who duly offered themselves. The prosecutions were withdrawn and all fines and penalties cancelled.

On the *Moeraki*, two stokehold vacancies arose from desertions, and the crew asked for two replacements from the Australian Union, but the Master refused. When the ship was due to sail back to New Zealand, the order to unmoor to "move to another berth" was refused on the suspicion that it

was intended to go to sea short-handed, and the men knew that they would face a stiffer penalty for refusing duty at sea. As it was, the whole crew was dragged to Court, charged with refusing a "lawful command", and jailed for 14 days. On release, another 4 men deserted, the Master took on 6 Australian scabs at New Zealand rates, and the whole remainder of the crew downed tools. The U.S.S.Co. applied for rescission of articles, the men were ordered to be returned to New Zealand on another ship, and the *Moeraki* sailed short-handed, manned solely by scabs. On arrival in New Zealand, the scabs were transferred to the *Marama*, but the crew of that ship immediately gave notice.

The *Marama* stoppage, which lasted some weeks, was thus caused solely by the U.S.S.Co.'s desperate efforts to save itself 30s a month on a couple of men's wages! The Union was probably right in seeing in this new penny-pinching policy the long and sinister hand of the Company's new owners, the "Inchcape Combine" (so called after Lord Inchcape, chairman of directors of P. and O. and other British shipping companies). At the same time, the U.S.S.Co. was making increasing use of chartered English vessels on the Nauru-N.Z., Newcastle-N.Z., and N.Z.-Frisco runs, and of chartered Hong Kong and Singapore vessels on the trade between N.Z. and Asia. The motivation here was not far to seek — it was purely in order to be able to pay lower rates than those required under the New Zealand Award, and *very much lower* in the case of Asian crews.

A dispute between the Seamen's Union and the Editor of the *N.Z. Worker* (the recently re-christened *Maoriland Worker*) at this time throws an interesting light on the current activities of the "Left Opposition" inside the Union. The editor (Jim Thorn) had refused to give publicity to a "Workers' Study Class" run by Walsh and a fellow-seaman called Peter Butler. Embracing a number of militants, chiefly seamen and watersiders, the "Study Class" met to discuss Marxian economics and trade unionism in the Communist Party rooms in Wellington, although they made it clear that they had no direct affiliation with that organisation. (Walsh had resigned from the Party in 1924). When a resolution was carried by a Wellington stopwork meeting protesting against the editor's "discrimination against a working class organisation", the Union's Head Office Executive ruled that "we cannot interfere with the internal affairs of the *N.Z. Worker*". However, a dis-

pute had arisen simultaneously between Thorn and the Australian Labour Government in a dispute which had resulted in the jailing of a number of Australian seamen at Fremantle. At the next stopwork meeting, Butler and Walsh successfully moved an endorsement of the previous month's resolution, using the Australian incident, the Union's investment of £2,500 in the paper, and Young's position on its Board of Directors, as compelling reasons why the Seamen's Union *could* interfere with the policies of the *N.Z. Worker*. This was not to be the last occasion when the *N.Z. Worker* was a cause of dissension in the Seamen's Union.

The big event in the New Zealand shipping world of 1925, and one which gave the militant left-wingers in the Seamen's Union a golden opportunity to increase their prestige with seafarers and test their powers of organisation, was the Homeboat Strike. A number of British liners were in New Zealand ports when a wage reduction for British seamen — the latest of several — was announced by the Maritime Board in London. Havelock Wilson declared, on behalf of the union that was supposed to represent the men, that though it brought their wages down to £9 a month (compared with £15 being paid in 1918), it had to be accepted. The patience of a large number of members exploded in what became known as the "Minority Movement", as it was supported by a militant minority on the Union's national council, and an unofficial strike swept British steamers wherever they happened to be across the seven seas of the world.

Leadership of the strike was extremely militant, and the "Minority Movement" in Britain was labelled "Communist". In New Zealand, the strikers sought assistance from the Communist Party, and Walsh and Butler took up their cause, Walsh taking up residence in Auckland to help organise them and publicise their case, and Butler performing a similar role in Wellington. In many ways similar to the *Tridale* incident of the late 1940s, the Homeboat Strike of 1925 roused a great deal of interest inside New Zealand, and opened unexpected rifts in the local trade union movement. The Seamen's Union officials were sympathetic, but were chary of clashing with the official policy of the British N.U.S. The job of dissuading New Zealand seamen and others from scabbing on the strike-bound British ships fell to the militants, and greatly enhanced the reputation of Walsh as a leader among New Zealand seamen. Not only did no New Zealand unionists offer themselves

for the British strikers' jobs, but very few New Zealanders of any kind: one of the few was the Auckland Seamen's Missioner, who announced that he was taking advantage of the chance of earning his passage to Asia to become a missionary, and that while he agreed "in spirit" with the strikers, he had to "stand by my agreement with my Lord" — which, as Walsh remarked in one of the lively Strike Bulletins he edited for the strikers in Auckland, "presumably meant Lord Inchcape".

Although the men held on for some months, they were finally forced (as the *Tridale* men were to be forced in their turn — with Walsh acting a somewhat different role) to sue for terms, but only after many of them had been jailed. The settlement was reached in Prime Minister Coates' office in October 1925, with delegates from all the strike-bound ships accompanied by Butler as their "advocate and spokesman beyond the reach of victimisation". Coates succeeded, after ragging Butler about his political views, in arranging an immediate return to work, no further prosecutions, discharges dependent on the return voyage, and remission of fines and all grievances appealable to the Board of Trade on return to London.

The strikers were clearly defeated, but Walsh and the group of militants surrounding him had made a name for themselves, and they had also learned valuable lessons in practical leadership.

DISRUPTION AGAIN: 1926-27

It was on the question of tactics in approaching the arbitration system that the Seamen's Union underwent the greatest internal convulsion in its history during the years 1926 and 1927. In the course of the upheaval, Tom Young not only lost his eminence as a leader of the organisation, but was expelled from it, a broken and discredited man; and F. P. Walsh (known to his friends variously as Mick, Jack, or Paddy, and to his critics as Tuohy or the Black Prince) became the dominant single voice in the leadership, a position which he held successfully against all comers until his death 36 years later.

The second ballot of the members on the question of de-registration from the arbitration system turned out to be as inconclusive as the first. Technically, the victory went once more in favour of the proposal, but the number of abstentions and informal votes was even higher than on the first count. The Union's Council, meeting in Wellington in February 1926, was faced with a difficult problem in interpreting the wishes of the members.

Tom Young argued in favour of immediate de-registration. He based this view not only on the official outcome of the two plebiscite votes, but also on his "28 years of experience" of the arbitration system, which, he asserted, had "never given us a thing we wouldn't have got without it". On the other side, however, a powerful line of argument had developed, based on a position no less "militant" than Young's, and somewhat more realistic. To begin with, although the Arbitration Court had inflicted wage-cuts on the seamen in the early 1920s, members of unions outside the Court had received even worse treatment, and had met with even greater difficulties in subsequently restoring their position. On top of that, negotiations were about to commence on a new agreement with the shipowners, and without the protection of stamping as an Award of the Court, there was considerable doubt as to just how legally binding on the employers any improvements would prove in the event of a new downturn in the economic situa-

tion, when direct action would be as fruitless as it had been in 1922. And finally, there was a lot of newspaper talk of pressures within the Government for abolishing the Arbitration Court altogether: and if the Tories were seeing that institution as a barrier to their interests, then the workers ought to have a fresh look at it.

The February meeting of the Council finally decided on a rather devious course of action. They resolved that the results of the plebiscites should be taken as a mandate for de-registering "as long as might be expedient", and that de-registration should accordingly proceed. Young also persuaded the councillors that advantage should be taken of this opportunity to put into effect the 1919 decision (long postponed for a "favourable opportunity") to consolidate the Federated structure of the Union into "One Big Union of Seamen" for the whole country. In June, however, the Council met again to compile the log of claims and carry out the negotiations with the ship-owners for the new agreement. Not only was the composition of the Council somewhat changed, but the outcome of the negotiations with the owners presented a completely changed background to the February decision. A substantial reduction in unemployment enabled the Union to obtain very marked improvements in both wages and conditions, the monthly rate for ABs returning to £15 4s and many of the "slave conditions" of 1922 being removed. The fact that the Union had to execute this agreement as an "Industrial Agreement" with the seal of its old entity as a registered union under the Arbitration Act, but specifically negotiated the omission of the clause requiring stamping of the Agreement by the Court to give it the force of an Award, appeared to cause the employers no concern at all. It occurred to the Councillors that the matter ought surely to concern the Union. The need to protect the Agreement — obtained admittedly under favourable circumstances outside the arbitration system — looked more urgent in face of the extreme uncertainty of the economic climate. The arguments advanced against de-registration in February began to acquire a new cogency. Councillors who had been present on the previous occasion now argued that the "expedient" period for de-registration closed with the signing of the Agreement. The Council instructed Young by 7 votes to 2 to re-register the federation, and the branch officials to re-register all branches.

In his subsequent actions, Young pleaded the official out-

come of the two plebiscites as his justification, completely ignoring the power vested in the Council under the rules to make any decision warranted by circumstances in the interests of members. The Dunedin and Auckland branches, after endorsing the Council decision at special stopwork meetings, were duly re-registered under the Arbitration Act as at 25 July, 1926, but neither the national federation nor the Wellington branch (of both of which bodies Young was secretary) were re-registered. When challenged at a stopwork meeting as to why he had defied a Council instruction, Young agreed to have the issue submitted to a further direct vote of the members of the Wellington branch — but this, like the earlier national votes, resulted in a legal majority for de-registration, contradicted by an actual majority of abstentions.

Faced with a demand for a further Council meeting, the Wellington Executive backed Young in lodging an application for the registration of the Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand and its Wellington Local under the provisions of the Trade Union Act — that is, Sir George Grey's act, which had pre-existed the arbitration system and served as such a useful weapon for the militant unions wishing to buck the system in the years before 1913. In his later account of his actions, Young added to his "legal" defence of the plebiscite votes an appeal to the militant traditions of this bygone period — but he found his position increasingly difficult when the Executive Council met again in October and instructed him to carry out the earlier decision. The whole of Dunedin and Auckland Branches ranged themselves behind the Council, and so did a sizeable and growing faction in the Wellington Branch. The breaking-point came when members paying their dues for the December quarter of 1926 in the Wellington office were issued with new numbers, and discovered on inspecting their books that they had been transferred to an apparently new organisation registered under the Trade Union Act.

All the doubts cast on Young's leadership (and integrity) during the previous few years boiled to a head at the stopwork meeting held in Wellington on 4 January 1927. In response to angry questions, Young calmly informed members that the new organisation was in conformity with the de-registration and "One Big Union" decisions, and that it would continue to operate in the same way as the old organisation except that the Head Office executive, increased by two

newly co-opted members, would continue in office for one year without facing elections until January 1928. It was this last denial of annual elections which swung the meeting so firmly against Young. There was incredulity that he should be doing such things, let alone trying to brazen them out; but the opposition seized the bull by the horns, and a clear alternative policy was presented to the meeting by F. P. Walsh, based on the repeated decisions of the Council and the reckless manner in which Young was "throwing national unity to the winds in the name of national unity!"

A unanimous resolution called for the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry of three sea-going members from each Branch to investigate the whole matter and recommend action for the restoration of the organisation's national unity. Walsh was among the three members elected to the Commission by the Wellington meeting; the resolution was endorsed within days by Dunedin and Auckland, who elected three more members each; and the whole Commission was convened in Wellington before the end of a week to commence a strenuous nine days of hard work, under the leadership of Walsh who was elected chairman.

Keeping in close communication with the members of the Executive Council and the officials of other Branches, the Commission actually anticipated its own outcome in a number of respects. Acting without any real authority, the Commission's members applied for re-registration of the Wellington Local and the whole Federation under the I.C. and A. Act — and, as things turned out, these registrations were effective from 25 January 1927, exactly two days before Young's "One Big Union" was registered under the Trade Union Act. Walsh's subsequent defence of this action was that it was done with the full knowledge and approval of the Executive Council, and that if it had not been done, Young's bogus organisation would by precedence have become the sole legal Seamen's Union.

In the work actually assigned to it, the Commission of Inquiry met with some resistance from Young and the Executive, who at first declined to recognise it, but were later persuaded (in the presence of a large number of rank and file members) to give evidence before it and hand over a number of minute books and other records for inspection. From these, it emerged that the old Wellington Local had been formally "wound up" by the Executive at a meeting on 8th December, and replac-

ed by a new organisation called the "Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand" to be registered under the Trade Union Act, with a completely new set of rules but the same old set of national officials. The Executive had also instructed the Bank to transfer the funds of the old organisation into the name of the new one, and had purported to carry out a number of other acts including the closing of the Lyttelton agency and sacking of Newfield.

It was apparently the intention of the Executive, even after the Wellington stopwork meeting of 4 January, to go ahead with its proposals to register the new organisation and its Wellington Local under the Trade Union Act, and subsequently force the other branches to affiliate to it as the only national seamen's organisation with any legal status; and then, having weathered the first year as its national officers (by placing themselves beyond the challenge of elections in terms of the rules), they presumably hoped to continue indefinitely as the leaders of the F.S.U. . . . These assumptions appear to have much more relevance to the growing mistrust of the officials among the rank and file, and the emergence of a strong alternative leadership, than they do even to the issues of registration and the arbitration system about which the debate ostensibly centred. Certainly the actions of Young and the rest of the Executive were open to the interpretation that it was all a matter of a small coterie trying to cling to power in face of mounting unpopularity. Walsh and the Commission, however, scrupulously argued the case in terms of the policy issues which underlay the power-struggle — although they were not averse to attributing the most despicable motives to the Executive, and especially to Young, by at least the most unmistakable implication. Young, on the other hand, argued that the Commission was a "Kangaroo Court" which was set up purely to "hang, draw and quarter" the Executive.

The Commission was highly critical of Young for giving a fallacious impression of the advantages of registration under the Trade Union Act, because the effects of the Labour Disputes Act (passed in the wake of the 1913 strike) had made the members of unions registered under the former statute just as liable to penalties for striking as those registered under the I.C. and A. Act. Furthermore, no agreement under the Trade Union Act could enjoy a preference clause.

"The Commission realises that both the Trade Union Act and the I.C. and A. Act are but Capitalist enactments design-

ed to nullify the power of the organised workers as a whole," declared the Commission's 23-page report. *"It is of no consequence whether we have to face the deadening effect of an act with a three-word name or five. One would gather, however, from the statements and actions of Mr Young that the Union stood to gain some access of power in changing its registration from one Act to the other."*

"The seamen's power is not a thing of words, but of conscious, thought out, well timed, unified action in the daily struggle against the exploitation of shipowners."

The Commission's report condemned Young and the Executive for improper conduct, gross neglect of duty, and forfeiting "all right to take any further part in the affairs of the Seamen's organisation". It also recommended that the Wellington Local be re-registered under the I.C. and A. Act "as a temporary measure", that provision be made for a national election of officers, that new rules be drafted and submitted to the members for approval, and that immediate action be taken to recover the funds and property of the Union from the "officials of the bogus union".

A special stopwork meeting was called in Wellington on 27 January (without Young's knowledge) to hear the Commission's report, and it approved the report and recommendations by 181 votes to 2. The meeting followed this action by electing a new interim executive (with Walsh as president and Newfield as secretary), and passing a resolution declaring the old executive to have "automatically relinquished their positions in the Union" and calling on them to hand over the custody of the Union's property and office. Sixty-odd members, led by Walsh, marched from the meeting to the office in Featherston Street, and after unsuccessfully demanding that the keys be surrendered to the newly elected officers, forcibly ejected Young and three other Executive members who were present, and occupied the office themselves. The strong-arm tactics are strangely out of tune with the decorous way in which Union offices change hands nowadays — but there was a sense of urgency and desperation among the members when they heard that a bogus organisation had been set up and was laying its hands on their Union's funds. To a large number of members, this seemed to be no time to wait for the slow outcome of legal processes: and the great majority of the Union's members indicated by subsequent endorsement that they approved of the action taken.

The Commission's report was endorsed within days by stopwork meetings at Dunedin and Auckland, and distributed in printed form to members. The deposed Wellington Executive, who transferred the office of their "new union" to premises close to Young's family business around the corner in Brandon Street, immediately printed and distributed their *Reply* to the Commission, in a pamphlet of equal length. This document impugned the basis on which the Commission had been set up, questioned the legality and impartiality of its proceedings, accused it of acting as a "front" for the Dunedin and Auckland officials in their desire to buck the majority decision of the members to de-register from the arbitration system, and made the claim that continued registration could only have harmful effects on the seamen. The pamphlet was especially cutting in its references to the Commission's chairman:

"F. P. Walsh forgot to remind members that each time he went to a ballot for position, the members rejected him by a good majority, and the only way he managed to get a position was to push his last opponent out by force of numbers and jump his position. Fittes defeated him in the last ballot by some 250 votes".

Once installed in the office, the new officers swiftly accomplished the work of re-solidifying the national structure of the Union which had ceased to exist. The re-registration of the F.S.U. and the Wellington Branch under the I.C. and A. Act, which the Commissioners had already applied for early in January, was duly effected on 25 January. In accordance with resolutions from all February stopwork meetings, the old Wellington officials were declared formally expelled. Nominations for new national officers were called for, and elections resulted in the confirmation of Walsh in the position of General President by 1270 votes to 409 for an opponent, and Felix Newfield as General Secretary unopposed. The position of General President was made a full-time one, replacing the old second paid job of "Assistant Secretary." The long "Walsh Era" began.

It would be a mistake to assume that Young's forcible removal from the Featherston Street office that January morning marked the last that was heard of him in the Union. Displaying the tenacity which had been so characteristic of him since his first accession to a Union office in 1898, Tom Young fought back against "the usurpers" with every weapon he

knew. His new union registered under the Trade Union Act had already succeeded in absorbing 600 members of the de-registered Wellington Local, by the simple method of "transferring" them when they came in to pay their December dues, before the Local was re-registered by the Commissioners on 25 January. With this core of book members, Young struggled to keep his vestigial "One Big Union" in existence for several months — issuing periodic broadsides in reply to statements from Walsh and Newfield, and attempting to cling to some part of the Wellington membership with even less success than William Jones had done thirty years before.

The largest meeting Young's "O.B.U." ever convened was a stopwork meeting called in February to try and halt the steady return of members who had been "transferred" into that organisation, back to the bona fide Union. This meeting turned out to be dominated by members who were no friends of Young, and while it heard statements from Howell and Fittes (though not from Young, who listened to the proceedings from an adjacent room but never appeared), it ended by passing resolutions condemning Young's union as "a bogus fraud", and expressing complete confidence in the "old union" and its "new leaders". By April, the re-registered F.S.U. Local in Wellington had over 220 at a stopwork meeting, while a meeting of Young's "O.B.U." the same day attracted no more than 20. Young tried to retrieve the position by a legal action brought in the name of a man called Brennan, a Union member of long standing who had been "transferred" by Young into his new organisation, and who had been accepted for a job on the *Kaimai* but was turned down just before signing on when Union officials told the U.S.S.Co. that the crew wouldn't sail with a member of a "bogus union".

The action was brought against "F. P. Tuohy alias F. P. Walsh" and Newfield for £100 damages "for wrongfully preventing the plaintiff from procuring employment by threats against prospective employers". In the course of the hearing, Walsh was subjected to some hostile cross-questioning by Brennan's solicitor, which included enquiries as to why he had changed his name ("I was victimised in America, so I took my mother's name") and whether he was a Communist ("I believe in justice for the workers." "You are refusing to answer me"), and generally the best case possible was made out against the new officials. But it was not successful.

In a lengthy judgement, the Magistrate found that Brennan

had not realised that he had been transferred into a new organisation, and that "the irony of the thing is that plaintiff, by virtue of the fact that he was a member of the unregistered society which entered into the Agreement of July 22, 1926 would . . . have been entitled to the benefits of the Agreement *so long as he remained a member of the same body*". Having (unknowingly) left that organisation for a new one, however, he could not claim benefit of the "preference clause" under the Agreement, and since the information given by Newfield and Walsh concerning the crew's attitude to sailing with Brennan had been in the nature of "communicating a fact" and had been done in "an extremely diplomatic tone", there could be no question of intimidation. Judgement was therefore given for the defendants.

This judgement was the death-knell of Young's "O.B.U." The bona fide Union had already instigated proceedings for the return of the funds by Young, but the outcome of the Brennan case made it a foregone conclusion. On the advice of his lawyers, Young settled out of Court and the funds were handed over. There was little further need to persuade individual seamen to transfer back from Young's organisation to the Union. Still, it continued to enjoy a paper existence for a time.

One of the principal causes which delayed the complete discrediting of Young as an industrial unionist was his established position as a personality in the wider ranks of the labour movement. At the time of his expulsion from the Union, he was an executive member of both the Alliance of Labour and the Labour Party, and he was easily able to persuade old friends like Jim Roberts (who had been through 1913 with him) and Peter Fraser (who had been a trustee of the Union funds and therefore a defendant in the aborted action for their return) that the takeover of the Union was in the nature of a "Communist plot". As a result, the Union had difficulty for more than a year in securing unqualified recognition from the rest of the labour movement. When Walsh and Newfield led the Union delegation to the Alliance of Labour conference in 1927, they found that credentials had already been accepted from a delegation led by Young and purporting to represent the Seamen's Union. The nearest the credentials committee would come to recognising the Union delegation was a ruling to seat both delegations without vote. Walsh indignantly led his delegation in a walk-out, supported by

McLagan and the Westland Miners' Council. The close association of miners and seamen had been (as we have seen) traditional, but in this instance it served only to deepen suspicion of the Seamen's Union's new leaders among the older unionists: for McLagan, like Walsh, had been publicly connected with the formative stages of the New Zealand Communist Party. The Alliance of Labour had since the war become increasingly intimate in its relations with the Labour Party, while the Labour Party was at this stage very anxious to dissociate its image entirely from the communists — who no doubt reminded Fraser, Semple, and other Party leaders a little too strongly of their own revolutionary past.

Young used the "communist bogey" against the new leaders of the Union for all it was worth, but never with much effect outside the ranks of his own closest associates. To begin with, his own image as a militant had been so firmly implanted in the public mind by a hostile press over the 1913 and 1922-23 periods that he was hardly taken seriously when he started throwing witch-hunting labels at others. An article in the right-wing *N.Z. National Review* even went so far as to hail Young's ejection from the Union with the headline "Red Officials Expelled"!

As time wore on, it became apparent that (whatever their political complexion) the new leaders enjoyed the apparently unshakeable confidence of the seamen, whose significance as a group made them an object of traditional respect in both the industrial and political wings of the labour movement. For some years, Walsh continued to lead the Union in distinctly militant paths — and even as late as 1929 he was still arguing in favour of Communists being allowed to retain membership in the Labour Party — but both the Alliance of Labour and the Labour Party found it necessary to show him increasing deference. Within a year of taking office in the Union, Walsh had replaced Young on the Alliance executive. By the following year, Walsh's standing with the Labour Party was so good that Young was either unwilling or unable to dissuade his wife, Margaret Young, from offering herself as a candidate for Wellington Central in the general elections, running under the banner of "Independent Labour" in opposition to the official Party candidate, Peter Fraser. Bitterly Mrs Young complained in a campaign speech that her husband had been pushed out of the Seamen's Union "by a miserable crowd of Communists who worked their way in at the instigation of the

Labour leaders", and accused Semple and Holland in particular of "punishing" Tom Young fifteen years later for having opposed the Waihi Strike in 1912!

After the final collapse of his "One Big Union", Young found a new niche for himself in the trade union movement as secretary of the Wellington Woollen Workers Union, and continued to provide a mild irritant to the Seamen's Union leadership by his presence at Labour conferences well into the 1930s. By the early 1940s, Young, now in his seventies, was employed in clerical work in the Public Service and died in 1953 at the age of 83. In his later years he supplied the Public Service Association with unsolicited advice on how to combat "communist activities" in its ranks on the basis of his familiarity with "communist tactics". But by this time the "communist" label had become singularly inappropriate for Walsh. From about 1930 he had firmly severed all links with the New Zealand Communist Party over a matter of Union policy, and his growing critical attitude to developments in the Soviet Union had led to his attaching himself to the political policies of the deposed leader Trotsky, with whom Walsh corresponded for many years. It was not until the 1940s, however, that Walsh became as free in the use of the "Communist" label against adversaries in the trade union movement as others had once been against him.

The last battleground in which Walsh fought to replace Young was on the Board of the N.Z. Worker Printing and Publishing Co., proprietors of the weekly *New Zealand Worker*. Though it had been the official organ of the United Federation of Labour and the N.Z. Labour Party, this journal had enjoyed mixed relations with official labour organisations over the war and post-war period, with the disappearance of the UFOL, and only with Jim Thorn's appointment as editor in 1922 had it become in any sense a Labour Party mouthpiece.

In fact, its ownership vested mainly in the industrial unions of the old UFOL. Of the total paid-up capital, £2,000 had been subscribed by the Seamen's Union, and, largely in recognition of this fact, Tom Young had been a member of the Board of Directors for a number of years. In fact he was Chairman of the Board at the time of his expulsion from the Union.

After battling for recognition in place of Young on the councils of the Alliance and the Party, Walsh and the new leaders naturally turned their attention to Young's anomalous position

on the directorate of the *Worker*. With the backing of stop-work meeting resolutions from all Branches, they made a concerted effort late in 1927 to gain direct representation on the Board for all substantial shareholders, and were accorded the enthusiastic support of McLagan and the Miners' Union (which owned nearly 4,000 shares). Young was again able to make effective use of the past and present political activities of Walsh and McLagan to convince "moderate" sections of the labour movement that the *N.Z. Worker* was in dire danger of "coming under Communist control". A further £2,000 of capital was confidentially subscribed (as Walsh put it) "from some hidden source by the financially impoverished executives of the Alliance of Labour and the Labour Party without consulting their affiliations or their rank and file" — just in time for the annual general meeting of the company at which the miners' and seamen's unions had given notice of their intention to move for proportional representation on the Board!

As a result, the two militant unions were outvoted, and Young retained his place on the Board.

In an indignant circular, the Seamen's Union executive referred to the fact that their rank and file had "supported the Labour paper with unstinted financial aid through many distressful years of master class persecution", and described the re-election of Young as "a deliberate affront to the seamen of New Zealand" whose consequent duty was "with the co-operation of the rank and file of other trade unions to rid the labour movement of this excrescence that is stunting the growth and development of a virile working class".

Eventually, under pressure from a number of other unions whose members expressed concern at the disfranchisement of unions which had made such signal contributions to the *Worker* in the past, the Board persuaded Young to resign before the annual meeting the following year, and Walsh took his place. But the miners' and seamen's unions, although they forced both the Alliance and the Party to give due recognition to their representatives through the importance of their numbers and their resources, continued to have bad relations with the *Worker* for some years. This fact, together with upheaval in the Australian Seamen's Union, eventually convinced the Seamen's Union of the need to have a journal of its own (for a brief period) in the 1930s.

12.

BACKS TO THE WALL: 1928-35

The most noticeable fact about New Zealand during these years was the number of men standing around with nothing to do, and the number of gaunt women and undernourished children staring in shop windows at the food they couldn't afford to buy. Unemployment was the overwhelming social problem, as well as the almost insuperable obstacle to the progress of industrial unionism.

New Zealand never really recovered from the postwar slump of 1921-22 before she was caught up in the tailwind of the Wall Street Crash of 1929. There had been a brief period around 1925 when things began to look up — and the Coates Government took full advantage of it to re-entrench themselves for another three years. But from 1926 until after the election of the Labour Government in 1935, there were never less than thirty to forty thousand members of the New Zealand work force without jobs — collectively, a shameful public symbol of criminal economic waste, and each individual case a shattering story of personal human tragedy.

This is the relentless logic of capitalism: those with capital, that is, the ownership of property by which wealth is created, ensure that they suffer the very minimum of discomfort from the appalling spasms of paralysis with which the system is intrinsically diseased, by depriving as many working people as necessary of the only source of income they possess — the sale of their labour.

Peter Fraser introduced a private member's bill in 1926 to set up an Unemployment Board with large worker representation, to plan constructive work to absorb all unemployed labour, financed by a tax on employers — but to no avail. Unemployed workers started forming their own unions that year, and from the first the Seamen's Union took a close interest in the organisation and policy of these bodies, contributing money to help establish them. The maritime industry was especially vulnerable to the fluctuations of the economy,

and unemployment a constant threat to the livelihood of seamen. The Union's new leaders had not only a store of personal experience of being out of work, and a sharp grasp of the need for unions of workers in employment to accept responsibility for helping to organise those not so fortunate, but also a vivid understanding of the menace which a hungry pool of "surplus labour" constituted towards all wages and conditions.

In 1927, the Union adopted a policy on unemployment, including the organisation of relief workers to demand union rates, the declaring "black" of all work paid at scab rates, and the direct representation of the unemployed on all Labour bodies. From 1926, an Executive member of the Union, P. M. Butler, acted as Organiser for the Wellington Unemployed Union.

Relief workers were currently paid the starvation rates of 9s a day for single men and 12s for married men, and the Seamen's Union saw this as evidence that "*the united employing class are now making a fierce attack on the wages and conditions of the workers of this country through the medium of their national executive — the State.*" This sentiment was fortified by a renewed assault on the few protective provisions of the Arbitration Act. With the backing of the shipping and freezing companies, as well as the sheepfarmers, the Coates Government introduced an Arbitration Amendment Bill which abolished the permanent assessors on the Court, allowed piece-work, and excluded farm and dairy workers from the operations of the arbitration system. One Labour M.P. described the Bill as "a piece of backblocks mud" — and the bitterness of opposition caused the Government to drop it. But the controversy showed that the employers were realising that the arbitration system was acting, in the depression conditions that prevailed, as a genuine protection for the wage-earners, and they were determined to emasculate it. One conservative economist (Prof. Tocker of Christchurch) and a wellknown spokesman for the sheepfarmers (Mr J. S. Jessep) loudly advocated abolishing the system altogether.

This threatening background prompted the Union Executive to favour a cautious, patient attitude towards any rupture of relations with those Labour organisations which were slow to recognise the Union's new leaders. An Auckland stopwork meeting had reacted so strongly against the Alliance of Labour that it had resolved in favour of disaffiliation because "the Alliance of Labour, under its present leadership, is of no

use to the unions of New Zealand". But the Union Executive, in a circular to members in October 1927, argued that "*The Employing Class stands as one united body in their fight against the Working Class. It is . . . up to the Working Class to build up a United Industrial Movement. . . The necessity of a United Front against the Employing Class is greater now than ever before.*"

The Union's militant perspectives were not limited to the coasts of New Zealand. In August 1927, the Union sent greetings to the Chinese Seamen's Union in "*the struggle against our common enemy, the international shipping trusts*", and forwarded the same organisation £50 as an earnest of "our solidarity with the Chinese seamen in their struggle against imperialist oppression" — in an eloquent resolution moved by Walsh. In October, the Union had to turn down a cabled invitation from the Soviet Transport Workers' Union to send a delegate to the celebrations in Moscow for the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. A unanimous resolution (moved by P. M. Butler) sent "fraternal greetings for the best success in their struggle to build up a new socialist order against the united capitalist forces of the world".

Such sentiments were not uncommon in the Labour movement of the 1920s — indeed, the Labour Party itself was willing to be enthusiastic about the cause of the extreme left provided it was geographically remote enough from the New Zealand voters. But the Seamen's Union was definitely out of line in its insistence on having the Communist Party paper (at that time called *Worker's Vanguard*) on sale in the office along with the *N.Z. Worker*, and in its violent objections to "the efforts of responsible leaders of the Labour Party to infringe the rights of Trade Unions to choose their own delegates to L.P. conferences and Labour Representation Committees" in the form of the "pledge", which had been introduced in 1926 to exclude members of other political parties from participating in the Party's councils — but obviously aimed at the C.P. Walsh argued vehemently for the repeal of the pledge at the Labour Party's 1929 conference.

The opening years of the "Walsh Era" in the Seamen's Union were marked by the restoration of the traditional alliance with the Miners' Union in the form of a clear-cut bilateral treaty which was first jointly proposed to the executives of the two organisations by Walsh and McLagan in 1928, and subsequently received the unanimous endorse-

ment of the rank and file at stopwork meetings. It bound the seamen to give financial help and refuse to carry coal when the miners were "engaged in a fight"; bound the miners to give similar help and refuse to produce coal for scab ships when the seamen were "engaged in a fight"; and bound each union to consult the other before taking action which could involve the other.

Negotiations with the shipowners, thanks largely to the intelligently militant tactics developed by the Union towards the unemployed and other industrial unions, resulted in 1928 in substantial improvements in conditions. Sustenance allowance ashore and the rate of surfing cargo were increased, overtime minimum was restored to half an hour, the start for daymen's hours in the engine room brought from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., time for washing decks on Sundays and holidays on overseas passenger ships reduced from 3 to 2 hours, payment was introduced for the first time for mooring and unmooring, disinfectant was supplied for crews' quarters, soap was upgraded, and towels supplied. In addition, an undertaking was given to discuss the installation of filters in crews' quarters, sinks in messrooms, and fans in the fo'csles of ships trading beyond New Zealand, on condition that general claims for these items were withdrawn.

An alleged breach of confidence over the negotiations for this agreement, details of which were leaked to the press before they were announced to the members, led to P. M. Butler's expulsion not only from the Executive but from the Union. In the 1928 Union elections he had stood against Walsh for the Presidency (to be defeated by 1,444 to 279), and although the two men were flung together in an alliance of convenience on the Federation of Labour Executive in the late 1940s and early 1950s, they maintained a strong personal antagonism towards one another from 1928 onwards.

The General Election of that year brought the defeat of the Coates Government and the resurrection of the effete Liberals (rechristened "United Party") under the ancient Sir Joseph Ward to take over the reins of office as the biggest party in Parliament. Economic conditions had produced a revulsion of opinion against the Government, and an apparently revitalised "Liberal" party benefited more from this revulsion than Labour, whose "socialist" notions were still regarded with suspicion by many small property-owners and "middle-class" wage-earners. A minority government, wobbling between

the support of the fallen Tories and the greatly increased Labour representation (up from 12 seats to 19, with well over a quarter of the total votes cast!), the Ward administration was hopelessly incapable of facing the enormous problems of mounting unemployment and economic disaster.

Inside the Union, Walsh began a full-scale crusade for a more thorough-going democracy throughout the structure. To this end, he proposed supplementing the participation of the rank and file in stopwork meetings, elections of officials, and periodic plebiscites on policy matters, with a network of Ships' Committees "to decide and act on matters affecting the whole crew". What had to be overcome was the fact that *"at Union meetings, members are active and interested . . . but it sometimes happens, when back on board ship, members become uninterested and stop their Union activities. For this,"* proclaimed Walsh in a circular to members, *"there is a remedy Take the Union on board!"* He recommended calling a meeting of the whole crew to elect a Chairman and Secretary, who, with a delegate from each department, would form a Ship's Committee to *"keep the spirit of unionism active"* on the ship, avoid *"frivolous disputes"*, solve urgent shipboard problems, and act as liaison between the members and the Union officials.

"The Ships' Committees, functioning actively, will prevent a recurrence of an Official Bureaucracy controlling Your Organisation!" declared Walsh, with disarming frankness.

"Take Warning! Set up Your Ships' Committees and Control Your Organisation!"

Behind this appeal to the rank and file there lay, in fact, some major points of disagreement between Walsh and the current Executive Council, but it is not really possible at this stage to question his motives. It is even possible to attribute the retreat from this position, and the greater centralisation of power within the Union which became characteristic of the "Walsh Era" at a later stage, to the insistence of Ships' Committees in taking up what Walsh regarded as *"frivolous"* issues, especially the holding up of ships because of attempts to discipline a single member of the crew for absence or drunkenness. An old acquaintance of Walsh's has quoted him as saying, during the 1930s, *"You can't lead the workers. They're a lot of ratbags who don't know what's good for them. You have to drive the b s."*

Two Australian Labour MPs visited New Zealand early in 1929, accredited by the Australian Miners' and Timberworkers'

Unions to appeal for help in national lock-outs resulting from a refusal to accept a 12½% wage cut. The appeal had a cold reception in many union circles in New Zealand, but the miners and seamen responded warmly enough, the Seamen binding themselves by resolution of stopwork meetings throughout the country to a levy of 10s a month on every member employed and every paid official. After reminding seamen of the help given by Australian miners in 1913 and 1922, Walsh wound up a circular to members: "*Remember, their success or failure must inevitably reflect in the standard of living of the workers of New Zealand, including the seamen.*" No less than £4,000 was subscribed by the Union to their Australian shore comrades in this way. In September of the same year the Union circulated subscription lists to help pay the legal expenses and support the family of the secretary of the Australian Seamen's Union, Jacob Johnson, who had been jailed for 6 months under the Crimes Act "for carrying out his industrial duty".

Several attempts were made in 1929 to undercut the New Zealand rate on New Zealand runs by use of crews on lower wages. The *Lawbeath*, sailing exclusively between Nauru and New Zealand, was manned with a mixed Asian and European crew, and a well-devised Union campaign resulted in the crew themselves, including the Asian members, demanding the New Zealand rate. The Master eventually agreed to this, but later qualified his undertaking by saying that he could give no guarantee of payment when the ship returned to Britain. In face of this, the crew all refused duty in Lyttelton, and were jailed. The Seamen's Union at once called on the assistance of the watersiders through the Alliance of Labour, with the result that the cargo of the *Lawbeath* was declared "black" and the owners were forced to give a more satisfactory undertaking. This was the first occasion on which the Union inspired action (admittedly in the interests of its own members) by an Asian crew, and the first occasion on which the Alliance proved its value to the Union after the removal of Young. It did much to cement relations between Walsh and Jim Roberts, although they maintained a strong mutual antipathy at the personal level throughout their lives. Walsh recorded the view of the *Lawbeath* dispute that "the action taken by the Alliance of Labour was a most important one, as it was to protect the interests of our fellow-workers in other countries".

In the same year, the Union forced the Government to reverse a decision to man its ship *Maui Pomare* with a non-New Zealand crew at scab rates.

The Union was also able to take an effective stand in support of the political struggles of an oppressed people, in declaring "black" all ships transporting military police to help the New Zealand administration hold down the rebellious population of Western Samoa. Because of this action, ships were delayed and sailed with far above the legal number of these passengers — contemptuously described by the Union as "*our own Black and Tans*".

In 1930, arising out of a case involving the Miners' Union, the Registrar of Industrial Unions ruled that it was illegal for a union to provide payment of any benefit to a particular individual out of Union funds. Although the Seamen's Union recognised that "*the first purpose of a trade union is to carry on a relentless fight against the employing class, and any other activities in which they engage should always be regarded as secondary*", it was still appreciated that the payment of funeral expenses for members and benefits for the families of those who lost their lives at sea, was one of the Union's traditional obligations. Accordingly, a plebiscite vote was taken on the establishment of a separate fund for these purposes, and the Funeral and Shipwreck Benefit Society was established with its own registration (as a "friendly society") and an initial annual sub of 5s. Membership was open only to Union members, but was voluntary, and only members of the Society could thereafter receive benefits.

Reduced employment opportunities naturally had their effect on seamen's incomes by this time, although wage cuts had not yet hit the industry as they had in the early 1920s. Resentment began to be expressed among a class of members known as "weak sisters" against any calls on their wage packets for which they could not see the immediate need. The crew of one ship were induced to sign a petition seeking the termination of the 10s levy for the Australian miners, on the grounds that the miners had "turned down a reasonable settlement" and the levy was "the work of a few irresponsibles at a stopwork meeting". Stopwork meetings unanimously condemned the petition as "scabby and contemptible" and pointed out that its implied reference to a 12½% wage cut as "reasonable" could well suggest that seamen would be willing to accept a similar cut. The ringleaders

were summoned before the Executive to explain their action, and let off with a warning.

The *Hinemoa*, currently running on excursions to New Zealand and Pacific tourists resorts, suddenly had its manning scale below decks halved from 6 to 3, and the crew gained Union support in refusing to sail her out of Auckland on these conditions. A scab crew was easily engaged from the "unorganised unemployed", but the watersiders and miners' unions gave them a "warm reception" in Westport, where coaling was held up so long that the owners came begging, sacked the scabs, and took on a full Union crew. The Alliance of Labour was able to boast that this incident proved that *"even with the present unemployment, we can obtain union conditions if we stand together"*.

"The main business nowadays seems to be to keep the workers on the bare existence level," commented the annual report of the Alliance in 1930. Premier Ward had made the inane boast in September 1929 that he was going to solve the unemployment problem in five weeks — but it kept getting steadily worse, and Ward resigned to die the following year, before the unofficial figures mounted to their all-time high of over 100,000! Forbes took over the Prime Minister's job, and within a further year he had formed a Coalition Government with the Tories, leaving Labour alone in honourable opposition to the idiotically shortsighted policies of the administration.

Forbes brought down an Unemployment Act in 1930, with none of the worthwhile features of Fraser's 1927 Bill, and a host of bad ones. The workers were to have only two representatives on the Board — both appointed by the Government! Finance was to be raised by a poll tax on men in employment, with complete exemption for company incomes! The Alliance of Labour convened a special conference of affiliated and unaffiliated unions where the Act was considered clause by clause, but the Seamen's and Miners' Unions failed to commit the whole movement to their policy of boycotting the nominations for members on the new Board, or even to an alternative method of financing its operations from a special tax on higher incomes. Walsh described the provisions of the Act as *"wage-reducing and union-smashing"*. He pointed out that the Government subsidy for local body works, being conditional upon "relief" rates being paid for labour, must be an inducement to more general reductions in wage rates, and he

compared the Board's dictatorial powers in directing the unemployed to poorly-paid jobs with "*the medieval Statute of Labourers or Mussolini's Fascist rule in Italy*". A deputation of 400 unemployed who marched through the streets of Wellington to Parliament to demand an interview with the Board a few days before Christmas in 1930 were bludgeoned down by armed police in Bowen Street, and two unemployed seamen were charged with "disorderly behaviour" and sentenced to jail for two months!

The militant unions were all extremely resentful when some of the men prominent in the "moderate" Trades and Labour Councils allowed themselves to be nominated for membership of the Unemployment Board. The first two representatives immediately shared with the Government itself much of the hatred and scorn which the working class felt towards the punitive conditions being imposed on the unemployed under the Act — and the immediate increase which it caused in the actual number of unemployed through the sacking of men on local body works so that they could be re-employed on "relief" rates with a Government subsidy! One of the two "workers' representatives" on the Board (Bromley of the Wellington Trades Council) was finally persuaded to resign in mid-1931 — and when the Seamen's Union renegade Tom Young canvassed for support to take his place, the bitterness of the militants became even greater.

At successive stopwork meetings throughout the country, the Union proposed the restoration of all New Zealand trade to New Zealand manned ships so that "New Zealand seamen could be given employment and not charity"; and also the solution of the economic debacle by attacking "watered stock, inflated land valuations, usurers' interest rates, and high salaries of non-productive officials" instead of just attacking "the present low wage of the workers". Following the announcement of a 10% reduction in Public Service salaries early in 1931, the Forbes Government gave a directive to the Arbitration Court that new Awards were to include a similar cut in all wage rates, and the Union responded with a call to "*all workers to unite in any action that may be necessary to fight a reduction in wages*".

Money was regularly contributed at Union meetings throughout this period to the dependents of unemployed workers jailed after demonstrations. "Some members may not see eye to eye with these so-called 'militants'," declared the Union's

Lyttelton Agent, Tom Martin, "But if it were not for demonstrations of this kind, the unemployed question would not be as prominent as it really is." It became a regular practice for unemployed seamen to be given a feed without question from the galley of any ship in port, although some companies (especially the U.S.S.Co.) dismissed any member of the crew caught introducing a "stranger" into the messroom. The Union, in a covert directive, told members to "support another member dismissed for giving a comrade a meal 'on the boss' — but use your DISCRETION when inviting men in the messroom".

The shrinking of employment opportunities by use of underpaid Asian crews again came to a head in February 1931, with the arrival in Wellington of the Japanese freighter *Brisbane Maru*, subsidised by the Japanese Government to horn in on trade between Australia and New Zealand. The Union organised a demonstration along the waterfront on the morning of the ship's arrival, with banners reading "Watersiders — Assist Seamen To Maintain Wages and Conditions" and "Protest Against Subsidised Cheap Labour". The march culminated with speeches by Walsh and watersiders' national president Glover at the waterfront labour pick-up. As a result, watersiders refused to unload the ship, and she was "sneaked out of the harbour by night" to Auckland to try her luck there.

The Communist Party threw its infinitesimal weight against the Union in this dispute, with shrill circulars accusing the Union of "racial prejudice" against the Japanese and of "helping the New Zealand shipowners against foreign competition" — but they had remarkably little effect on either the seamen or the watersiders or even the unemployed on whom the Union called for support. Indeed, Communist Party members were noticed among the marchers in Union demonstrations on the issue. The Union's own response to the C.P. line was not so much angry as contemptuous. The Union's stand was not only based specifically on the protection of its members' jobs and wages: it had avoided any possibility of genuine misinterpretation as being "racist" by appealing directly to the Japanese crew of the *Brisbane Maru* themselves, through a Union member of Japanese parentage who translated the Union's message into Japanese and got it across so successfully that the crew expressed their complete solidarity with the Union's stand by announcing that they would not supply steam if scabs were employed to unload the ship.

"We have no objections to the Japanese: they are workers, exploited just the same as we are," Walsh declared. "The point at issue is that the standards we have built up are undermined by the invasion of ships with crews on wages and conditions much lower than ours. The Japanese seamen get £4 a month to our £15 4s to £18 4s. The wages and conditions of the Swedes, Canadians, Americans, and British are lower than ours too — and we equally object to them being used to attack us. And being good unionists, they will object to being used! We would have no objection at all to them coming here *provided they were paid our rate* — and I'm sure they wouldn't object either! But of course the shipping barons wouldn't bring them all this way if they had to pay them higher wages. *They're only here because they're cheap*. If we can show them what good wages and conditions can be won by strong unionism, then we'll be striking a blow for Japanese workers as well as ourselves!"

As to "helping New Zealand shipowners," the Union pointed out scornfully that every strike could equally be said to be "helping foreign shipowners against their New Zealand competitors" and "anyway — how New Zealand is the Union Company?"

The N.Z.C.P. was later reprimanded by the Australian C.P. for its line on the *Brisbane Maru* incident, but it never acknowledged its mistake. Small as the N.Z.C.P. was (and ever has been), its policy in this matter would have had little significance if it were not for its impact on the leaders of the Seamen's Union and especially on Walsh. Up until this time, like many trade union militants, he had respected the C.P. as a serious organisation working in the interests of the working class, and had frequently consulted its leaders on policy matters. He had increasingly disagreed with them, but continued to listen to them. After the *Brisbane Maru* incident, he wrote them off as incorrigible. Although he seemed uncertain whether to regard them as sectarian fools or as conscious scabs, he made no bones about pointing out that the effect was the same either way: "Whether it's brains they lack, or honesty, they seem to work objectively against the interests of the workers".

The N.Z.C.P., for its part, took to referring to Walsh as a "left renegade" and "traitor to the working class" — charges which received little support among militant unionists generally for nearly two decades. For, despite Walsh's overbearing

attitude to militants (especially Communists) who jeopardised the unity of the Union in moments of crisis, as late as the mid-1930s he was still applying an essentially Marxist analysis to the contemporary economic and political scene, and even quoting at length in the Union journal which he edited for a period from eminent overseas Communists.

Walsh followed the *Brisbane Maru* to Auckland, and with a sharp demonstration on the waterfront there, the Union managed to persuade the watersiders to refuse to unload her there either. When it became evident that labour would be called for from among the unemployed, a further demonstration converged on the unemployed labour bureau, and all the jobless workers offered work on the ship "did in" their dole for the week rather than sully their industrial reputations by scabbing. A united procession of seamen, watersiders, and unemployed climaxed the campaign by marching through the business section of Auckland to demonstrate their solidarity, and made a deep impression on both the general public and the employers themselves.

Finally, in desperation, the Auckland agents for the Japanese shipowners approached the Unions to negotiate terms for the unloading of the ship. After much talk, and many cables to and from principals overseas, a contract was signed on 9 February 1931 between the Seamen's Union, the Watersiders' Union, and the Osaka Shosen Kaisha, undertaking that the company's vessels would cease to operate on the New Zealand-Australia run, and that in consideration for this undertaking the inter-colonial cargo on the *Brisbane Maru* would be discharged on this one occasion.

The victory was not inconsiderable, and had the immediate effect of causing other foreign-owned ships to leave behind in New Zealand ports cargo destined for Australia which their owners had contracted to carry but were not game to make an issue of. The seamen were made to appreciate the extent of their victory rather more forcibly through the pages of the *Seamen's Journal*, their own monthly paper, which had commenced publication at the end of 1930 as the result of a plebiscite of members following some unusual difficulty in the Union's obtaining unrestricted access to the columns of the *N.Z. Worker*.

In March 1931, the Alliance of Labour convened another conference of affiliated and unaffiliated unions (including the unemployed) to develop a policy for combating wage reduc-

tions. The Union played an important part in the proceedings. Walsh was elected a member of the crucial committee charged with bringing down recommendations on methods of action, which proposed a boycott of all firms imposing wage cuts, a united campaign to deduct the percentage of any cut from all rents, food bills, and mortgage repayments, and the election of a National Industrial Committee to organise "wide-spread and effective industrial action" against any cuts — all of which were endorsed by the conference, but failed to be followed by any really effective action. A deputation sent to Parliament to discuss the issues with the Prime Minister marched through Wellington from the Trades Hall accompanied by a procession of 4,000 workers, with the Seamen's Union in the lead, carrying banners proclaiming "NO WAGE REDUCTIONS!" Similar processions were held in other centres in the ensuing few weeks, with rallies addressed by members of the "National Industrial Committee".

"These meetings are having the effect of arousing the workers to resist the proposed wage cuts," declared the *Seamen's Journal*. *"It is our job to fight for wages against capitalist profits. The capitalists can pay. If they can't, let them give way. It is not our job to clear up capitalism's mess for it, but to destroy it."*

But the Trades Council unions proved better at voting for resolutions than at carrying them out, and the Seamen's Union was looking further afield for support within a few months. Bill Clarke was sent to Australia to try and secure joint action on both sides of the Tasman to pressure the two Governments for legislation protecting the wages and conditions of seamen, including the exclusion of competition from subsidised cheap labour.

Two disasters at sea in 1931 again brought to public attention the grisly dangers of the seamen's work, and underlined the priorities of the shipowners who invariably placed the chance of a big profit before the risk of their mere employees' lives. In May 1931 the *Progress*, built in the 1880s as a dredge, converted to a schooner in World War I, and reconverted to a screw steamer in the 1920s, lost her propeller while crossing Cook Strait, ran into a rock in Ohiro Bay, and broke in two before lifeboats could be launched. Four of the crew were drowned within sight of the shore, despite brave efforts by local fishermen to provide help through heavy breakers. It turned out that the old tub had

previously filled and sunk while undergoing repairs, but then refloated and given a certificate of seaworthiness. The Court of Inquiry was also critical of the master of the Harbour Board tug in turning back from a rescue mission when the sea turned rough.

In October, the wooden screw steamer *Kotiti* disappeared altogether with 5 crew and 2 unlicensed passengers, during a trip from Westport to Foxton. Pieces of the ship were thrown up on western beaches of both islands, and a corpse picked up off Cape Farewell Spit was identified as one of the passengers. Built for the Northern Co. in the 90s, the *Kotiti* remained an official mystery, but the Union expressed the opinion that "the bottom dropped out of her". An inquiry was steadfastly refused by the authorities for "lack of evidence". The Union produced evidence that the ship was known to be leaky only a month earlier, and that a few days before the disaster her holds had flooded twice when the engine failed in Wellington Harbour and the pumps were not in working order. Finally, after a long publicity campaign assisted by questions in Parliament, a hasty Inquiry was held which declared that the *Kotiti* was "seaworthy" and that her loss was in no way caused by "any act or default" of the owners or master — a verdict which the Union claimed was "contradictory and against the weight of evidence".

The Labour Party conference that year saw a massive move by the Seamen's and Waterside Workers' Unions for a card-voting procedure to give some recognition to the numerical contribution of affiliated unions. Walsh was elected to a committee which recommended a system of modified card vote which went some way towards this end and led to the industrial voice in the councils of the political labour movement being greatly strengthened.

The Forbes Government made a fatuous effort to avoid a general election that year by proposing an "all-Party Government" — which would clearly have had the effect of involving the Labour Party in the general opprobrium attaching to politicians for the current economic misery, and of staining the name of Harry Holland with something of the moral revulsion with which British workers associate the name of Ramsay MacDonald. The "United" (Liberal) and "Reform" (Tory) parties did, however, cut their individual losses to form a "National Government", and went into the election campaign as a single combat unit; and they won. The Labour Party

increased its representation in Parliament to 24, and its total vote to 241,991 — well over a third of all votes cast, but not enough to topple the old orthodox parties.

Legislation passed in 1931 empowering the Arbitration Court to “review” Awards in the light of “economic conditions generally” (unrelated to cost of living) brought a general 10% wage cut, but Walsh’s shrewd leadership had prompted the Seamen’s Union (ironically, in the light of the controversy over the 1926 Agreement which preceded Tom Young’s removal from office) to negotiate an unregistered agreement in 1930, and this escaped the axe. The Union claimed that “if the other sections of the maritime unions were linked up with us, they would have escaped also”. On top of this, short, sharp confrontations, backed up by the Union’s known influence among the unemployed, succeeded in obtaining during 1931 an increase in the manning scale of new vessels, “thus finding employment for a few extra of our members”.

1932 saw unemployment reach new heights, with demonstrations of jobless workers charged by mounted police and turned into full-scale riots in both Auckland and Wellington. Oppressive legislation followed, with the Public Safety Conservation Act (described by the Labour Party as “panicky” and “provocative”) putting unprecedented emergency powers into the hands of the Government, and a solemn notice in the official *N.Z. Gazette* prohibiting the printing or distribution of Edward Bellamy’s forty-year-old socialist classic *The Parable of the Water-Tank*, and another one prohibiting the entry into New Zealand of anyone (including New Zealanders!) who had within the previous three years visited “any country . . . directly or indirectly under the control of any communist form of government”!

The same year saw a further move in the castration of the Arbitration Court, with the enactment of the recommendations made by the Employers’ Federation four years earlier. Compulsory arbitration was abolished; and while the organised workers didn’t shed many tears at its passing, they recognised that it was being finally knifed by the Government only to make the exploitation of the workers in time of record depression conditions just so much easier.

The Union took an emphatic stand against all these repressive legislative measures; but their protests were no more effective than they were in resisting the employers’ insistence

that year that the 10% wage cut should be extended to all seamen — more than twelve months after it had been inflicted on the majority of New Zealand wage-earners. The employers in fact argued for a 20% cut, in view of a second 10% believed to be imminent from the Court, but the Union was at least successful in having the additional cut “postponed”.

Towards the end of the same year, the Union was involved in the aftermath of two earlier disputes.

In November, the Wellington Trades Council finally took the action of ridding itself of Tom Young, who was at that time its President. Two complaints against Young had been received — one from the Seamen’s Union, for an article published in his name in the right-wing *N.Z. Observer*, accusing the Union of doing “little to assist the seamen”; and one from the Cooks’ and Stewards’ Union, for his action in trying to split their organisation by promoting a separate union for Chief Stewards. Young was expelled from the Trades Council by a unanimous vote, and bade farewell to his long and variegated career in the trade union movement.

In December, the C.P. journal (known for the moment as *The Red Worker*) published a letter claiming that Walsh had told seamen in Napier to handle scab-killed meat from the Hawke’s Bay freezing works whose regular workers were currently out on strike. The paper headed the item “The Black Prince Appears — WALSH AIDS BOSSES”, and introduced it with a paragraph claiming that it “showed Walsh in his true role”. The statement was in fact erroneous, as Walsh had spoken only of scab-sheared wool, which he had given definite advice to members *not* to handle, and in any case the Napier watersiders had already declared the scab meat “black” and the Seamen’s Union regularly acted in close co-operation with the watersiders in such matters. Walsh issued writs for £300 damages for libel against both the publishers of *The Red Worker* and the writer of the letter, on the grounds that it meant that he had “been induced to betray the interests of the working class” and “had so acted as to forfeit the confidence and esteem of the members of his Union and the labour movement generally” — but he finally accepted apologies from both the writer and the initial recipient of the letter, and by the time the action against the publishers came to court, it had been announced that they had been sentenced to 3 years’ jail for sedition. As one of Walsh’s closest associates in the Union (Tom Martin) told a

stopwork meeting: *"No doubt those convicted had made a practice of attacking the officials of our Union, but we all have to admit that 3 years is a savage sentence to deal out to any person who dared publish his opinions in print"*.

The Agreement came up for renewal early in 1933, and the employers argued hard for a further 10% wage cut. This had, of course, been anticipated, and following a resolution of the Wellington stopwork meeting in November 1932, a national plebiscite of the membership had resulted in an overwhelming majority for the proposition that the Union should refuse under any circumstances to accept a further wage cut. The Executive Council, however, believed that they had an obligation to see how good a deal they could achieve in negotiations, and they kept the employers talking for weeks. In the course of it, they traded certain demands for improved working conditions for a reduction in the size of the proposed wage cut, hoping (apparently) to get it wiped altogether in return for nothing lost. They finally agreed, subject to the approval of the members, that the seamen should take a cut of only 5%. When the agreement was submitted to the members for their approval before being signed, the Union leaders were able to argue with some confidence that it was *"the best bargain that could be had across the table in present conditions"*, and they pointed with pride to the fact that it certainly kept the take-home pay of seamen in a relatively better position than that of any other section of industrial labour. Still, the outcome of the plebiscite had been clear, and as Walsh told the Wellington stopwork meeting considering the issue: *"This organisation is run by its members, and we're putting it back to you. Either we accept this, or you show us that you're prepared to do something about trying to get it improved."*

It is fairly obvious that the matter was not posed in quite the same terms at any of the other centres, for there the agreement was approved — unanimously in Dunedin and Lyttelton, and by 150 to 1 in Auckland. In Wellington, the vote went 211 to 51 against accepting the Agreement. All the meetings were held on the same day (2 May 1933) and the result of the vote in the other centres was not known in Wellington till late afternoon. By that time the Wellington officials, anticipating the possibility of a national rejection of the Agreement (as seemed probable from the outcome of the plebiscite), had summoned a meeting of ships' delegates to outline a strategy for confronting the shipowners, and this

meeting decided to call another stopwork meeting next morning to consider the vote in other centres.

The total vote in all centres indicated a 288 to 212 majority in favour of accepting, but it was pointed out at the second Wellington stopwork that other centres had possibly not considered the alternatives which were open to the Union. It was accordingly resolved to notify the shipowners that Wellington members were prepared to sail only on the terms of the existing agreement, and a rank-and-file committee of six was elected to act with the Head Office Executive in conducting negotiations from this point. The owners responded with ultimatum: either all the ships then held up sailed to sea at once in terms of the new Agreement, due to take effect from 1 May, or the crews would be given 24 hours' notice and the positions be opened to "free labour".

The special stopwork meeting, resuming in the afternoon of 3 May to hear the outcome of negotiations with the owners, decided to adjourn without decision until they learned whether other branches would support their stand. Only the Lyttelton ferry sailed that night, as the Union believed that it was in its own interests to maintain inter-island communication. Special meetings in the other centres on 4 and 5 May all decided, in view of the Wellington decision, to see if a united stand could not win them some improvement. The enlarged committee in Wellington commenced preparations for picketing round the clock in 4-hour watches, and all the other necessary arrangements for a strike. Strike committees were elected in all other centres, and from 5 May there was virtually a total stoppage on the coast.

The enlarged committee in Wellington operated together with the Executive Council (which had been recalled into session) as a National Strike Committee and immediately approached other unions for possible support in terms of the policy laid down at the Alliance of Labour's special conference of three years earlier. The watersiders announced that they would not handle cargo to or from scab-manned ships, and the cooks and stewards of all strike-bound vessels in Wellington walked off, refusing to remain on board with scab crews, and received the immediate backing of their Union.

The shipowners were naturally no less energetic in their preparations. The Government obliged them by an overnight suspension of the Shipping and Seamen Act, and amateur

scab crews were recruited for the *Maunganui*, *Tamahine* and *Arahura* — on the terms rejected by the Unionists, including the 5% cut!

In Auckland, all ships except those of the Northern Co. and the U.S.S.Co. agreed to continue paying the old rate, and pursuant to a resolution of a general meeting, the local strike committee instructed the crews of these ships to sail. A dramatic four-page leaflet put out by the Auckland strike committee carried a photo of the deck of a Union Co. intercolonial ship awash in heavy seas on the Tasman, and appealed to the workers of New Zealand to remember the exceptional hardships and dangers of seamen's work, and to support them in their struggle.

"You have often read of the men who have gone to sea and never come back. . . If a prisoner in Mt. Eden Jail fell down exhausted at his work in the quarries, there would be comment in the press and demand for inquiries. But it happens almost daily in ships. . . That is only a small part of our life at sea. We are not making it an excuse for our refusal to accept the shipowners' new award. . . We ask you to judge us fairly, and give us your support against wage cuts, and help us to hold our present conditions."

On 8 May, the National Strike Committee approached the National Council of the Alliance of Labour for support, and that body proposed a meeting with the shipowners, accompanied by representatives of the Seamen's and the Cooks' and Stewards' Unions, to probe the possibilities of a satisfactory settlement. All parties agreed to this meeting, and the Alliance spokesmen (headed by Roberts) opened proceedings by outlining the enormous proportions to which the dispute was bound to grow, involving the watersiders and others to the detriment of the whole national economy ("which is already tottering") unless a solution were found quickly. The shipowners countered by asserting that the Seamen's Union's repudiation of the Agreement indicated that there was no guarantee that any of its elected representatives really had the power to negotiate — but Walsh pricked this bubble by pointing out that all decisions involving the members of the Union had always been subject to ratification by the rank and file. Eventually a 5-a-side committee was set up to seek a basis of settlement, and after two days of offers and counter-offers, the owners asked to meet the whole National

Strike Committee on 10 May to submit their "best possible offer".

This turned out to be a 12-month agreement based on a 2½% wage cut with 2s 2d an hour for overtime, in return for an immediate resumption of work. The Strike Committee demanded the continuation of the old agreement till the end of May, the dismissal of all scabs, the period of the new agreement to be subject to further negotiation, and the reinstatement of all members of the Cooks' and Stewards' Union. The owners finally agreed to the first three points, and to enter negotiations on the fourth point directly with the C. and S. Union, which concluded satisfactorily a few days later. The proposed settlement was immediately wired to all centres, including Westport (where a number of ships had been in port at the commencement of the stoppage, and a strike committee had been set up), and on Thursday 11 May, meetings everywhere except Westport approved the terms.

A publicity meeting for which the Union had booked the Wellington Town Hall that evening was cancelled in view of developments, but later proceeded with when "it was realised that a big section of workers would come along anyway." Walsh and a member of the Strike Committee called Douglas Gibson spoke to a large audience on the origins and conduct of the strike, supported by Peter Fraser, M.P., who stated that he regarded it as "his duty as a public representative of Labour to support the men in the course they had taken".

Work resumed on Friday 12 May — one week after it had stopped — with the proposed wage cut exactly halved, and the Union (for the first time in its history at the end of a nationwide strike) more united and in better organisational trim than when the strike had begun. *"As to the result,"* declared Walsh. *"there must inevitably be a conflict of opinion. Few strikes can be said to be successful in the immediate sense. Many have ended in defeat — mainly through mismanagement. The Seamen have certainly not been defeated. . . They have given an excellent example of how a strike should be carried on. The initial error of sectional action was immediately repaired, and the solidarity and discipline thereafter were beyond all praise."*

All the same, a persistent section of the rank and file felt that some lessons, especially concerning the circumstances out of which the strike had begun, needed to be driven home a little further. A special meeting of members who happened

to be ashore in Wellington the following week, unemployed or on leave, decided to set up a Rank and File Committee, led by militants who had played a conspicuous part in the strike — some of them having also been prominent in the overthrow of Young six years before. Its chairman was Douglas Gibson, its secretary T. F. Benson (a member of the 1927 Commission of Inquiry), and among its members was Robert Adams, who had also been a member of the National Strike Committee and was to feature largely in the stormier incidents of the Union's history over the next few years. This committee never had official Union recognition, although it claimed to have been set up by resolution of a properly constituted stopwork meeting; but Walsh and the other officials paid it as much attention as they believed necessary to prevent the open disruption of the Union, although they detected the hand of the "so-called Communists" in it.

The committee's first concern was the Executive Council's apparent lack of contact with rank and file opinion in recommending an agreement which contradicted the plebiscite vote to accept no further wage cuts. The Council, the committee concluded, was "overloaded with paid officials" and with a "psychology of failure and mistrust, which, if left undisturbed, could only result in the organisation becoming an instrument incapable of resisting any further attacks on our living standards, and therefore losing any reason for its continued existence". Accordingly, it recommended a number of changes to the Union rules, including the exclusion of all but working seamen plus the General President from the Executive Council, limiting the General President's vote in Council to a casting vote, the introduction of preferential voting for all Union positions to eliminate "vote-splitting", and giving the delegates of ships in Westport and Greymouth the status of Agents to enable crews there to participate more fully in the democratic decisions of the Union.

When these recommendations were brought forward at regular stopwork meetings, they met with the answer that all changes to the Rules required the formal endorsement of both a plebiscite vote and a vote of the Executive Council. As to restricting the membership of the Council to working members, Walsh asked, "*What do you elect full-time leaders for if you don't want them to do any leading?*" He argued that paid officials were sometimes less likely to take a narrow sectional view of policy matters, and more likely to see them "in

the perspective of the welfare of members as a whole" than "blokes straight off the deck or up from the stokehold" — and, in any case, the democratic structure of the Union, with a full membership vote for all official positions and on major issues of policy, ensured that "the paid officials never get too far out of touch with what the members are thinking. . . That was proved in the strike. We acted as one organisation, because we give our officials enough power but not too much. If we went in for a lot of tinkering with the Rules to set up an artificial distinction between them and the members they represent, we would actually increase the chance of splitting the organisation and destroying its effectiveness as a combat unit against the master class."

The proposals were in fact endorsed by a Wellington stop-work meeting, but rejected in all the other centres, and the most important result was a deep and growing antagonism between the Union's leaders (especially Walsh) and the members and supporters of the rank and file committee (notably Adams). Adams levelled bitter accusations (with some justification) that the new Award, in which the 5% cut had been reduced to 2½%, also contained a number of alterations which involved some deterioration in working conditions in each case; but the majority of members were content to see that the strike had achieved some saving in wages at least, and to regard the internal dispute entirely in terms of the fact that (as one member put it at a stopwork meeting) "Adams is against Walsh, and Walsh against Adams, and that is at the back of the present charges". The fact remained that, by united action, with unprecedented rank and file participation in the leadership, the Union had defeated the employers' object of a substantial wage cut.

Negotiations on the duration of the 2½% cut proved unsuccessful, and it not only survived a year but looked as though it might continue for a further year. The possibility of "irritation strikes" arranged at moments when (as had been the case in Wellington in May 1933) significant numbers of ships were in one port at one time, was freely discussed at stopwork meetings as the most effective tactic to use for the restoration of the cut in the current employment situation. The Executive Council recommended in July 1934 that, in the absence of assured support from other unions, no further direct action should be attempted, but that in any event the Union should only ever act nationally as a single body. This recommenda-

tion was accepted as a statement of policy by meetings in all centres by 336 votes to 210. At Wellington, however, it was defeated, and a further stopwork meeting was arranged four days later to consider a straight-out strike motion.

The strike issue was carried by a big majority at the second Wellington meeting, and by a narrow majority at a meeting held in Lyttelton; and in obvious emulation of the manner in which the strike of the previous year had been launched, the Wellington militants urged the holding of a national vote on the issue of an immediate strike, which should be put at further meetings in Dunedin and Auckland, and at meetings of crews ashore in Westport and Greymouth.

Crucial in what later occurred was the concentration of colliers, mainly manned by militants, at the two West Coast ports during the last days of July 1934. The crews of these ships, acting along the lines of one of the unadopted recommendations of the Rank and File Committee, held their own meetings, and a total attendance of 102 voted unanimously for a strike. Informed by a telegram from Head Office that the total vote in other centres had gone 315 to 222 against a strike, the crews on the West Coast concluded that the addition of their 102 votes reversed the decision to make it 324 to 315 *in favour* of strike, and after wiring Head Office to this effect, they resolved to hold up their ships until the position had been clarified.

Head Office, seeing some justice in the desire of these working members not to be excluded from the vote, decided to include them together with a number of members currently ashore in Australia, and wired Greymouth and Westport that the final totals were 396 to 330 against strike, and that they should accordingly take their ships to sea. But meantime a number of militants ashore in Wellington had decided to take matters into their own hands, and persuaded the crews of several ships to anticipate a pro-strike vote by delaying sailing, and Adams is alleged to have assured the delegates at Greymouth and Westport by wire that their vote had in fact given a national majority for strike action and that members in Wellington were refusing to man their ships. Confused, the West Coast delegates wired all branches for information as to the outcome of their individual vote, and Anderson from Auckland sent them (mistakenly or deliberately) the figures for voting on the Council's original recommendations, which were 439 for and 114 against. This conflict of information prompted

the West Coast crews to press ahead with unilateral action, in the probably honest belief that they were acting in accordance with a majority decision and that in any case they were now "involved definitely in a fight for restoration of wage cuts."

The crews were immediately arrested, taken to Court and charged with refusing to obey lawful commands, but the hearing was adjourned from Friday 27 July until Monday 30, and meantime a wire from the Executive Council in session in Wellington informed them that assurances had been obtained that no sentences or loggings would be imposed if they took their ships to sea at once, and called on them to do so. The crews at Grey met again, but a motion to comply with the Union directive was rejected by 37 to 31. The 68 men then marched to the Court, were sentenced to 14 days imprisonment each, and were marched with police escort to board the evening goods train for Christchurch, farewelled by a cheering crowd of 1500 Greymouth workers and unemployed.

The morning after they arrived at Paparua Prison, the 68 men received a visit from Walsh, Bill Clarke, and Tom Martin, who addressed them in the Prison Chapel, stressing the importance of keeping the Union united in whatever action was to be taken, and (in the words of an account written by one of those present, and highly favourable to the strikers) "dispelling some of the illusions we were under". As a result, the men voted by 42 to 26 to accept immediate release in return for taking their ships to sea. Released on probation, they were accompanied back to Greymouth on the train by the three officials. Here they boarded their ships and sailed, although there was some further hold-up on the *Kaimai* pending the outcome of a meeting of the crews at Westport, who eventually voted 63 to 55 to resume work. Before sailing, the members of the Strike Committee attended a meeting of employed and unemployed workers' organisations in Greymouth which led to the establishment of a network of Councils of Action on the West Coast, led by the Miners' Union national secretary, McLagan. This movement, which acknowledged the inspiration of the seamen's unofficial (and abortive) stoppage, aimed at fighting for the restoration of wage cuts by irritation strikes: but this was not the only subsequent echo which the stoppage was to evoke.

One of its effects was clearly good — and this was the granting of full restoration of all wage cuts to the crew of the *S.S. John*, a ship owned by the small Western Shipping Co., in order

to get her out of Greymouth quickly just after the strike started.

More debatable effects included the opprobrium which immediately attached to Walsh and the other officials involved as alleged "strike-breakers". The cause of resisting the wage cuts was undoubtedly a popular one, and militants throughout the country nourished the belief that a firm stand by the Seamen's Union would lead to a wave of strike action sweeping New Zealand and winning back everything the workers had lost. In fact, there was a great deal of truth in what Harry Holland had told the miners not long before he died in 1933, that "*Industrial conflicts are won on rising markets. . . With tens of thousands of men unemployed, the dice is always heavily loaded against the industrial workers*". As the resultant Award had proved on later examination, even the success of the 1933 strike was largely illusory. The spirit of the men who wanted to test the strike weapon again was certainly laudable, and in the finest tradition of unionism; but realism was probably on the side of Walsh and the Union officials who whipped them back into line.

One writer in the left-wing weekly *Tomorrow* quoted the Seamen's Union officials as having told the strikers in Paparua that "if they did not go back to Greymouth and man the ships, the Union would take steps to man the ships from Wellington", and added the comment: "This is the first case in which I have heard of trade union officials threatening to act as blacklegs for the employers".

Walsh instituted legal proceedings for libel against the writer and both the printers and proprietor of *Tomorrow*, claiming £500 damages; but after a retraction and apology had been published in a number of journals throughout the country (and Walsh had been assured by a number of loyal Union colleagues that *Tomorrow* was run by "progressives and good fellows", and that a legal hearing would "only aggravate the situation"), the action was withdrawn.

Another contentious aspect of the aftermath of the Greymouth Strike was the Executive Council's recommendation for the expulsion of three members (including Adams and Gibson) and the suspension of three others for 12 months, which was subsequently endorsed by the members in a plebiscite vote. A number of other organisations addressed pleas to the Union to drop all disciplinary action "in the interests of unity", but all these organisations (including the Seamen's Union of Australia, a number of West Coast miners' and

watersiders' unions, the Unemployed Workers' Movement, and the Friends of the Soviet Union) were sharply informed that the Seamen's Union was "*not answerable to other organisations for the way in which it handled its internal business*".

Gibson challenged the legality of the plebiscite method of expulsion by Court action, and the Court upheld the view that, since the Union was strictly an association of three separately registered unions, it was improper for any member of one of them to be excluded from membership by a ballot which included members of all three. On the strength of this decision, all the expelled and suspended members returned to full membership, and continued for some years to lead an opposition group inside the Union to Walsh's leadership. Their characteristic accusation against Walsh was that he was "a shipowners' agent" and "the Havelock Wilson of the South Pacific", while he came to describe them variously as "the mad militants", "disruptors", and "union-wreckers". A side effect of this convulsive internal debate was the cessation of publication of the *Seamen's Journal* from early in 1935. Not only had it become (according to the leaders) "a more effective vehicle for disruptive pressures inside the Union than for propagating Union policy", but funds which were earmarked for printing costs were substantially eroded by the costs of fighting the "disruptors".

The isolation of the militants was undoubtedly intensified by the action of the C.P. in publishing in their journal (at this time called *The Workers' Weekly*) the information — which the Union's members had been put upon their honour to keep confidential — that a plan of concerted action against wage cuts had been agreed upon between the Union and the Cooks' and Stewards' Union. It is not apparent that this action was of very great significance (let alone the "act of treachery" that Walsh described it as), and in any case a large number of the militant opposition group was dedicated to the particular nostrums of the Socialist Party of Great Britain rather than the C.P. Still, Walsh used this incident with great success to surround all the militants in the Union with an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust which ensured that the position of the leaders was essentially unchallenged for many years.

Nobody can say with any certainty what would have been achieved had the Union remained united behind a militant policy during these years, or if the dynamism engendered in the 1933 strike had been sustained in further "irritation" stop-

pages with official backing. The fact is that the Union was hopelessly divided on tactics; and the weight of the Union officials having been thrown on the side of caution, and in favour of isolating the militant opposition, the possibility of further strike action with any prospect of success became a dead letter. Still it needs to be recorded here that, in the course of the Gibson hearing, the Chief Justice of the day gave it as his opinion that the leadership's declared policy of favouring "irritation tactics" in 1934 apparently "had no other purpose than to deceive the members".

In general, the seamen had weathered the depression no worse than any other section of the labour force. Economically, indeed, they fared better than most: and their union still had a fighting spirit uncommon elsewhere.

From early in 1935, the economic situation began to show glimmerings of improvement — not through any action of the hopelessly inept Forbes Government, but by a slight stirring of international trade stimulated largely by the radical economic measures adopted by the Roosevelt administration in America. Wage cuts started to be restored to New Zealand workers, and the Union succeeded in gaining a partial restoration in its 1935 Agreement.

The profound malaise which had overtaken New Zealand's economy, however, required much more thorough-going attention, and as in the 1890 period the energies of most radical New Zealanders were transferred from industrial methods of improving the worker's lot to political methods. A minority of dedicated apostles tried vainly to convince the people that the answer lay in a socialist revolution, but that course never looked like a remote possibility in the New Zealand context, even in the depths of the depression. The street riots of 1932 (regardless of the panic reaction of the silly Government) had been isolated outbursts of anger and frustration, not the premonitory rumbles of social upheaval. By 1935, most socialists were urging New Zealanders to "elect a Labour Government" — and when they did just that in the landslide elections of 27 November 1935, the organised working class looked to the new Government to improve their conditions by legislative means. History justified this view.

13.

GREAT ADVANCES: 1936-41

The period which opened with the assumption of power by the New Zealand Labour Party at the end of 1935 — with 55 seats in a Parliament of 80, and the bedraggled forces of the National Government reduced to impotent opposition — was a period of tremendous progress in the welfare of the New Zealand workers. It was also a period when the leaders of the industrial labour movement were closer to the levers of power than they had ever been in the country's history. And because of these two factors — the great strides in social welfare achieved through political means, and the political influence of the trade union movement — it was also a period of industrial inactivity.

The trade union movement rapidly found many of its traditional functions taken over by the State. They were all jobs which badly needed doing, and they were undertaken by the State in conformity with planks in the Labour Party's platform which had been included in response to trade union pressure. But to a very large and increasing extent, they cut the ground from under the feet of militant industrial unionism, and reduced the trade union movement from the potential (and sometimes active) fighting force it had been, to a rather flabby paternalistic machine which collected dues, arranged for the stamping of Awards, and constantly shepherded its members into courses which would avoid the supreme offence of "embarrassing the Government".

Labour was elected just as the country was actually emerging from the worst years of depression it had ever passed through: prices were rising, unemployment falling, and trade was already on the move. There were still men unemployed — many more than the figures which strike alarm into public opinion in the 1960s — but the first broadcast speech by Savage after being sworn in as Prime Minister included the announcement of a Christmas bonus for these men, shortly followed by an undertaking to a deputation from the Unemployed Workers' Movement that the whole unemployed work

force would be absorbed into constructive public works at union rates of pay "as soon as was humanly possible".

Savage was an ex-brewery worker, an old "Red Fed" but an occasionally practising Roman Catholic with a mild manner that belied his radical past. Shorter than average height, with a gentle tongue and a kindly smile, he had been elected leader of the Party on the death of the uncompromising old militant, Harry Holland, little more than two years before Labour took office. Committed to a policy of social reconstruction, Savage's Government went about the task very politely, assuring the wealthy that they had "nothing to fear" and cautioning the unions to "go easily." Still, it would be quite wrong to conclude that this Government did not go about the task of social reconstruction very much more thoroughly than it had ever been attempted before.

In its first term, the Labour Government brought in the 40-hour week; it restored the Arbitration Court to its full powers; made union membership legally compulsory for every worker covered by an Award or Agreement; embarked on an unprecedented programme of building roads, railways, bridges and houses; and carried a Social Security Act which greatly extended the range of welfare benefits for old people, widows, mothers, and medical and hospital expenses.

The immediate effects of reviving the Arbitration Court, cutting the working week, and priming the economy with heavy expenditure on public works was to raise wages and reduce unemployment. And the immediate effect of compulsory unionism was a vast increase in the number of both unions and union members. As an experienced Union organiser, Walsh took a leading part in organising two previously unorganised sections of workers on the basis of compulsory unionism — the clerical workers and the biscuit factory workers — and for many years he held office in these two unions as well as the Seamen's Union.

Those who place a high estimate on the role of "great men" in history could spend many hours debating the significance of the part played by F. P. Walsh during this period, and of trying to pinpoint the date or incident which marked his "shift to the right" from the Marxist militant he undoubtedly was in his earliest days in the Seamen's Union to the upholder of industrial harmony and scourge of the militants he had become by the end of World War II. The same people would be confronted by an equally difficult problem in attempting to

pinpoint the date or incident which marked his "return to the left", to the forceful advocate of direct action and "class struggle" that he appears to have become in the few years immediately before his death.

It would seem to be a more fruitful field of research to trace the policies of the Seamen's Union, and of Walsh as its unquestionably dominant leader in those years, in the context of the development of the whole New Zealand Labour movement. What had happened suddenly during the cataclysm of 1890 happened again, more gradually, following the abyss of 1913 and the economic chasms of the 1920s and early 1930s. There was a shift of faith from industrial solutions towards political solutions to the enormous problem of attaining a decent life for the working people. In the course of this shift, individual organisations and leaders frequently changed the emphasis and direction of their standpoint, sometimes favouring old militant courses, sometimes favouring new moderate courses, and sometimes appearing uncomfortably to be straddling the fence and favouring both at the same time.

This last, ambiguous standpoint is exemplified in the formation of the Federation of Labour within two years of the Labour Government's election. Uniting the Alliance of Labour and the Trades and Labour Councils in a single body, it simultaneously committed the "moderates" (at least on paper) to the objectives of socialism, industrial unionism, and influencing the political Labour movement in a radical direction; and yoked the "militants" in a political bond with Labour Party politicians for whom they had frequently expressed their scorn, and made it a point of honour with them not to "embarrass" the Labour Government.

The ambiguity of this position is underlined in the prolonged public debate between Walsh and Jim Roberts which accompanied the splitting of the Alliance of Labour in 1935 and preceded the formation of the F.O.L. in 1937. Among the many memorable phrases they hurled at one another was Roberts' accusation that Walsh was a "johnny-come-lately" in the labour movement and remarkably ignorant of its history, and that during earlier struggles in which Roberts had played a prominent part, Walsh was "probably a somnolent shepherd boy tending his father's flocks on the plains of Patutahi".

The bitterness of the debate was increased by a demarcation dispute between the Seamen's Union and the Waterside Workers' Union in 1937 over a clause in the watersiders' Award

which appeared to cut across the traditional duty of seamen on ships of under 275 tons to drive winches for cargo.

In the upshot, Roberts, the old militant who had frequently declared his contempt for "Labour politicians", became increasingly less involved in the trade union movement and more involved in the Labour Party, of which he was president from 1937 till 1950; and Walsh, who had acquired the reputation of being the trade union movement's most thorough-going convert to moderate policies and loyalty to the Labour Party, became almost exclusively interested in the F.O.L., of which he was an executive member from its foundation almost continuously until his death.

The amalgamation of the two tendencies in the F.O.L. was shown from the outset in the background of its office-holders. The first president was McLagan of the Miners' Union, ex-communist and old ally of Walsh with a more recent record of industrial militancy than Walsh's. The first secretary was Fred Cornwell, long associated with the very moderate Painters' Union and secretary of the moribund Trades and Labour Councils Federation. Affiliated to the F.O.L. were practically all the trade unions in the country, "industrial" and "craft"; "militant" and "moderate"; those traditionally supporting arbitration and the hesitant policies of the old Trades Councils with their historical connections with the "Lib-Labs", and those traditionally supporting collective bargaining and historically associated with the Maritime Council and the "Red Fed". The explosively expanded membership of the rapidly multiplying number of trade unions precipitated by compulsory unionism, immediately gave the F.O.L. a prestige and influence which no industrial organisation had ever enjoyed in New Zealand's history before. The Seamen's Union was an active affiliate of the F.O.L. from the beginning, but the power and influence in the F.O.L. of the Union's principal spokesman, Walsh, was enhanced by his connection with the "new unionists" in the insurance offices and sweet factories as well as with the senior industrial union which had been his first stronghold. Inside the Federation, he represented *both* historical tendencies in the trade union movement, and dominated a very substantial voting strength.

Savage did not die until 1940, but from early in the career of the first Labour Government it became apparent that its most powerful single figure was not the little man whose gentle phrases and sweet smile had won the hearts (and

votes) of such an impressive majority of the population: emphatically in effective control of the political machine was the tall, stooping figure of Peter Fraser, old Marxist of the "Red Fed" and the *Maoriland Worker*. Squinting through thick gold-rimmed spectacles at the front row of an audience, and speaking in a strident shout with a heavy Scots accent, he never had even the potentiality of becoming a popular leader. Fraser's strength lay in a different direction. An old Cabinet colleague has declared of him that "no man ever understood the mechanics of power better than he did, or enjoyed using them more". In his enthusiastic participation in the power-game, Fraser found a natural ally in Walsh, and from 1937 onwards the two men operated increasingly, and with devastating effect, as a power-team, performing innumerable coups in both the industrial and political wings of the Labour movement, as well as in the national administration and public life generally, redounding to the advantage of one or the other or both of them.

The chief effect of this alliance of mutual convenience on the trade union movement was a firm rein held by the F.O.L. leadership over actual or threatened outbursts of direct action; but as far as the Seamen's Union was concerned, it was at least partly responsible for winning them tremendous advances in working conditions. It is true that the improved employment position stimulated by the Government's policies greatly increased the workers' bargaining power: but, unlike other groups of industrial workers (such as the watersiders and the miners) who gained conspicuous improvements in their conditions during those years, the seamen very rarely engaged in traditional forms of militant action. Walsh overawed the militants in the Union with the notion that industrial militancy was "scabbing on the Labour Government": and, with the help of the political pressures Fraser was able to exert, the shipowners were induced to improve their employees' hours of work, manning scales, menus, and living quarters; and at the same time the traditional policies of the Union on such matters as a State-owned shipping line and the international solidarity of seamen seemed to go into cold storage.

After the initial impetus given to living standards and working conditions by the measures of its first 3-year term, the Labour Government was returned to power in 1938 with a slight reduction in seats but an overwhelming majority in the popular vote. Now it was faced with a new set of economic

difficulties, associated partly with a "flight of capital" by investors suspicious of the Government's radicalism, partly with a cost of living which was rising more rapidly than wages. As a result the first steps were taken in the direction of what came to be known as "economic stabilisation" with Government subsidies on basic foods. Still, the continued erosion of newly improved working class living standards by spiralling prices kept causing tremors of discontent among the trade unions — especially following the outbreak of war in 1939.

The FOL had from an early stage based its official policies and objectives on those of the big industrial unions which had formed the backbone of its initial membership. From the first, the older "craft" unions had been uneasy allies in the pursuit of some of these policies, and the large number of small unions which sprang up in the wake of compulsory unionism were bound in the long run to overwhelm the big industrial unions in voting power, and isolate their militancy: but in the first flush of unity under the wing of a Labour Government carrying out a radical programme endorsed by practically the whole New Zealand working class, the FOL maintained a fairly united front on a progressive platform which greatly strengthened the Government in its radical measures at home and abroad.

At the 1939 conference, for instance, the FOL president reassured the smaller unions that though the Federation's policy was "industrial unionism", there would be no effort "to enforce a premature organisation on industrial lines". Prime Minister Savage reminded the conference that "the standard of life for the workers depended on what was produced" and appealed for "loyalty and continued support of the Government", while Webb, then Minister of Labour, suggested the setting up of "industrial councils of employers and workers", and assured delegates that "a degree of stabilisation was absolutely necessary".

The acceptance of compulsory arbitration in the form in which it was restored by the Labour Government is indicated in the report of the I.C. and A. Act Committee (chaired by Walsh), which was endorsed by this conference. The outspoken alignment of the trade union movement on foreign policy matters — especially collective security and anti-fascism, had been very marked from the FOL's inception. But though the Munich Agreement of 1938 was hailed by members of the

Labour Government as "an act of statesmanship", the FOL continued its former policy unabated. The 1939 conference carried a motion (moved by Walsh for the Seamen's Union) supporting "the Chinese people in their heroic fight" and recommending affiliations to boycott Japanese goods. The socialist internationalism implicit in this resolution is typical of the stance taken by the F.O.L. in the pre-war years, prompted entirely by the militant unions (and largely by the seamen). It had its impact in helping to keep the foreign policy of the Labour Government strikingly independent from that of the Chamberlain Government in Britain, and making New Zealand's voice one that was listened to with respect in the League of Nations.

When war broke out between Britain and Germany in 1939, the Labour Government committed New Zealand to immediate hostilities by the side of Britain, and brought down a series of drastic Emergency Regulations which (among other things) prohibited all strikes and lockouts, and established an Industrial Emergency Council representative of employers and unions to advise on matters affecting employment conditions. These regulations were accepted by the FOL, and Walsh was appointed a member of the Industrial Emergency Council from its establishment. This, like other appointments to official boards with which Walsh was honoured during this period, greatly enhanced the prestige and influence of the Union, but also bound it more securely to the status quo and inhibited its freedom to maintain its traditional role of continually advancing industrial demands for improved wages and conditions — let alone backing them with industrial action.

The 40-hour week had (according to the Government) proved "impracticable" of achievement in the shipping industry, and though other concessions were obtained from the ship-owners in its place, there was some bitterness among seamen that they should miss out on a reform enjoyed by all land workers: but the onset of war largely quashed the effects of this reform ashore, and the seamen certainly had much to be happy about in the improvements achieved in the late 1930s — including the introduction of separate messrooms in all new ships, the provision of utensils and bedding (so that seamen no longer had to come aboard with their own "donkey's breakfast"), and the upgrading of crew's menus (which made the celebrated achievement of "ham and eggs on Sunday mornings" in the mid-1920s look very elementary).

By 1940, the war had become even more of a grim reality to seamen than to most New Zealanders. On 19 June, the *Niagara* was sunk by a German mine in the Hauraki Gulf only a few hours out of Auckland Harbour. On 20 August, the *Turakina* was torpedoed on its way to Wellington by a German raider only 260 miles off the Taranaki coast, with the death of 33 of its crew. On 25 November, the *Holmwood* (formerly *Tees*) was captured by German raiders just after leaving the Chathams for Lyttelton, and was sunk after the 17 crew and 12 passengers had been taken off as prisoners; and two days later the *Rangitane* was sunk 2 days out of Auckland with a cargo of wool and dairy produce, after a bombardment in which 5 crew and several passengers were killed. A Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the wartime safety of shipping held sessions which were largely secret, but among its recommendations were stricter control of shipping information and a closer watch on "subversive" elements among the seagoing community. It also had something to say about a campaign for greater public consciousness of the need for keeping any incidental facts known about the departures or arrivals of ships "confidential", but this was linked rather with the Government's desire to build a "war-consciousness" in the population than with the specific question of safety at sea.

The seamen believed there was a strong case for some monetary recognition for the greatly increased dangers they faced in carrying out their everyday duties under war conditions: if something was not done, they argued, it would mean that shipowners, whose property was insured under war-time regulations with Government guarantee, would in effect be profiteering at the expense of the lives of their employees.

Conciliation on the 1940 Agreement with the shipowners succeeded in gaining wage increases (£19 18s for an AB, and £1 more for a fireman), and some improvement in other conditions, but there was no agreement on the demand for a War Risk Bonus. Finally, following a joint approach by the Seamen's and the Cooks' and Stewards' Unions, Prime Minister Fraser ordered a compulsory conference between the unions and the shipowners, and a bonus of £1 15s a month was fixed.

Late in 1940, an echo of the 1934 Greymouth Strike brought a considerable quantity of dissension into the Union's ranks. Of those expelled in 1934 and later restored to membership

following a decision of the Supreme Court, only Adams continued to maintain a running opposition to the Union leadership. The opportunity of taking further disciplinary action against Adams occurred when he was convicted in September 1940 of a minor offence and sentenced to one month's imprisonment. Adams has consistently claimed that this case was a frame-up, but it has to be recorded that (following the Adams v. Walsh libel case 21 years later) a Magisterial Inquiry found no reason for quashing the conviction. In any case, it served as a reason for expelling Adams from the Union. A subsequent effort by Adams to gain admission to a stopwork meeting in Wellington and state his version of the case resulted in a fracas in which he received certain injuries, and cyclostyled circulars championing his cause in the name of an 'Anti-Expulsion Committee' included far-ranging attacks on the current administration of the Union, and particularly on the integrity of Walsh.

In a circular to members replying to the "Anti-Expulsion Committee", the Union's Executive Council ascribed the agitation over Adams to "the Communist Party and its disruptionist tools", whom it accused of turning stopwork meetings into "bedlams of discord and confusion at which the proper transaction of Union business became impossible". At this point, before the Soviet Union became our gallant ally, the C.P. in New Zealand (as elsewhere) was active in propagating anti-war sentiments, and the Executive Council's circular was able, by implication, to convict Adams of supporting the C.P. policy which "opposes resistance to Hitlerism, thus giving support to Nazi aggression which, amongst its many crimes, sinks ships and slaughters seamen". Much of the circular was occupied with a spirited defence of Walsh, with the explanation that his various Government appointments were due to the fact that "*the officers of an important organisation like our own are expected to play their full part in these matters and must do so if our Union's pledge of support to the Labour Government is to be anything more than empty words*". His positions in other unions, it maintained, were "on a purely honorary basis".

Early in 1941, the Union took action to prevent another old opponent of the leadership from rejoining the industry. This was Maurice Wall, formerly a close associate of Walsh, who had been Assistant Secretary of the Union for several years following the expulsion of Young in 1927, but had left the

Union (after an open breach with Walsh) to become secretary of another maritime trade union. Attempting to return to sea in 1941, Wall was blocked by a complex procedure (initiated by Walsh) under the War Emergency Regulations, which resulted in widespread publicity and increased opposition to Walsh throughout the trade union movement.

The merits of the Adams and Wall cases are, at this distance, difficult to determine, but they still arouse intense feelings among members and former members of the Union. As recently as 1962 many of the issues were given another public airing in a successful action for defamation brought by Adams (now secretary of the Wellington Painters' Union) against Walsh after he was alleged to have told a meeting of the FOL's National Council that Adams had been expelled from the Seamen's Union for "thieving from his mates". The chief significance of the affair at the time was the successful use which Walsh made of it to counter mounting criticism of his own increasing involvement in the administration of government, and to help Fraser's current campaign against critics and dissidents in the Labour movement.

The role of the C.P. in the years 1939-41 is a special case: it was certainly hard for trade unionists to take it seriously when from the middle-1930s it had been consistently pressing for collective resistance to the aggressive activities of Nazi Germany, but greeted the actual declaration of war on Nazi Germany as "an imperialist war". All the same, criticism of the measures the Labour Government thought necessary in prosecuting its war effort came from far wider circles than communists or even those who had supported them. The attempt to label all criticism as "subversive" became increasingly dulled in the handling. Semple, as Minister of Works, signed circulars to the foremen on State projects all over the country calling for the dismissal of all workers guilty of "subversive" talk, and a report on each one for the compiling of a national Black List. Fraser, a little uneasy about his role as a war leader against the backdrop of his activities of 25 years before, had the volumes of the *Maoriland Worker* covering his anti-war campaigning and his trial for sedition withdrawn from Government libraries, and ordered the prosecution of newspapers for carrying news of industrial discontent.

The most widely discussed piece of witch-hunting in the Labour movement in 1940 was the expulsion of the Auckland M.P., John A. Lee, from the Party — effected with the help

of Walsh, who cyclostyled selections of the victim's more inflammatory writings for circulation among conference delegates, and organized the massive use of the trade union card vote.

The "Anti-Expulsion Committee" kept up its activities in the Union with further circulars, mainly levelling bitter personal accusations against Walsh, well into 1941. They were massively answered by unanimous resolutions of stopwork meetings in all centres in May of that year, characterising their utterances as "filthy" and "libellous", and calling for the expulsion of any members found guilty of aiding in their production or distribution. But industrial unrest was not to be stifled by the isolation of individual militants whose activities were directed against the close collaboration between important Union officials and the Government.

A general feeling of disquiet was overtaking the whole trade union movement. Where was Government policy heading? Why were the movement's leaders so apparently unwilling to do anything about challenging Government policy or trying to influence it in new directions? Prices of food and other necessities continued to rise, and the Government (at least five of whose members had been jailed in the first world war for opposing conscription) introduced conscription after a hasty conference with the Federation of Labour, who were promised that it would be accompanied by "conscription of wealth" as well. Seamen were declared an "essential industry" and exempt (on application) from call-up, but other important sections of the labour force were not so privileged. The breach of principle and tradition affronted much wider circles of the Labour movement than its left wing, especially when "conscription of wealth" was seen to mean no more than an excess profits tax, more than offset by cost-plus contracts and other forms of legalised profiteering.

The living standard of the working class was being visibly reduced, and the achievements of the Labour Government's first term in office seemed to be in danger of evaporating. With thousands of men under arms, unemployment had at last been completely wiped out, but Manpower Regulations (which amounted to a type of industrial conscription on the home front) prevented the shortage of labour from commanding any advantage in the way of higher wages or better conditions.

Against this background, the apparent closeness of co-opera-

tion between the Government and the upper echelons of the trade union movement (and, conspicuously, between Fraser and Walsh) increased the concern of ordinary trade union members. It was reported in the daily press, and afterwards assiduously repeated by the "Anti-Expulsion Committee" in the Seamen's Union, and by various "underground" papers issued by communists and pacifists, that Walsh had gone on record at the special Economic Conference in late 1940 as saying that *'the Labour movement is prepared to go on the same basis as the soldier. The workers don't want to gain as a result of the war. They are prepared to make equal sacrifices'*. This didn't sound like the traditional voice of the New Zealand trade union movement. While contractors were obviously minting quick fortunes out of the war, who was protecting the interests of the mere wage earners?

The time had evidently come for a coup from the top, a dramatic act by the trade union movement to show that it was independent of the authority of the Government it happened to support and was still entitled to the confidence and loyalty of its rank and file. The FOL Executive approached the Government on the question of the growing disparity between prices as revealed in the cost of living index, and current wage levels. Would the Government be averse to an application to the Arbitration Court for a General Wage Order?

Exactly how the Government responded to this approach remains in doubt. McLagan afterwards alleged that the Government "consented" to the application, but Fraser insisted that it was "against our advice". In any case, the Federation went ahead with an application for a 7½% general wage increase, based clearly on increases in the cost of living, and the case was heard late in 1941. Although the workers' representative argued in a dissenting judgement that a 5% increase would be "in the national interest", the majority of the Court turned the application down flat on the grounds that any wage rise in present circumstances would be "inflationary". The coup had failed.

Relations between the leaders of the FOL and Government became worse than they had ever been: Walsh had his first public disagreement with Fraser for fifteen years. Feeling the hot breath of rank and file discontent, and lacking the handy weapon of red-baiting since the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union and the conversion of the local C.P. to ardent partisans

of the war effort, the leaders of the trade union movement had nothing left but a confrontation with the Government.

The whole crisis boiled to a head at a special meeting of the FOL Council in Wellington just after New Year, 1942, and a demand was conveyed to the Prime Minister for an immediate meeting with the whole of the Parliamentary Labour Party to discuss their differences frankly and work out some basis for solving them. The Federation (effectively led by McLagan and Walsh) knew that the radical voice of Labour's past could still find some echoes in the Labour Caucus, and that if the Federation confronted the Government in the presence of this whole body it could be sure of finding some allies and thus of bringing more persuasive power to bear on Fraser; but Fraser knew it too, so the proposal for a meeting with Caucus was declined, and instead the FOL Council was offered a meeting with Cabinet together with the Labour Party's National Executive. The FOL accepted, and the crucial gathering took place in Parliament Buildings on 9 and 10 January 1942.

14.

THE SHADOW OF STABILISATION:

1942-1949

It was a bitter moment of truth when the political Labour leaders were confronted by the grievances of the unions.

Feelings were high by the end of 1941. In the Seamen's Union, besides the general resentment at the growing disparity between rising prices and pegged wages, there was an outburst of direct action among the fishermen. This group of seafarers, who had been organised by the Union in 1939 (in some areas as a separate organisation, in others as part of the Union itself), held up the sailing of a number of South Island trawlers late in 1941 in an effort to force up their piece-rate payments, and the Minister of Labour (Webb) threatened to invoke the Emergency Regulations. "*Our members have been jailed by every government this country has had for the past sixty years,*" retorted Walsh. "*They wouldn't be averse to doing it under this one.*"

The Federation of Labour Council were determined to make the politicians acutely aware of the discontent that was rife among the workers; but Fraser was equally determined to head them off.

"The amount of good a Labour Government can do is probably exaggerated," he declared as he opened the joint meeting in Parliament Buildings. "In the movement, people are forcing matters that make conditions worse and are weakening the movement. How to retain what has been won in this country is the problem now." He referred darkly to Japan's entry into the war only a few weeks before. "In this war we cannot succeed without the help of everyone. We must be in a friendly state with the Federation of Labour."

McLagan and Walsh proceeded to enlighten him as to why the Government was *not* in a friendly state with the F.O.L. The Court's refusal of any wage rise indicated that stabilisation was a one-sided affair, loaded against the workers. "We agreed to price stabilisation, and took the blame from the rank and file," said McLagan. "The Government let us down. . . We

were sold a pup, left with our hands empty to face our members. . . They want the balance put back just a little in their favour."

Continually interrupted by Fraser, McLagan enumerated other grievances, including the high profits shown by business concerns; employers' exploitation of the F.O.L.'s assent to the increase of permissible overtime hours and reduction of overtime payments; the surrender of workers' holidays (while Cabinet Ministers appeared at the races!); the Government's discrimination against left-wing journals (at least two had been suppressed) while the capitalist dailies were allowed to undermine national unity by constant sniping at the Government.

Walsh followed up the attack: "*We thought stabilisation, if we got it, would give greater success. Things have got worse. . . Our main object in coming here is to see that you are kept in office.*"

The crossfire of interjections, references to the inconsistency in certain Cabinet Ministers' contribution to the "war effort" in the two World Wars, accusations and counter-accusations of "dictation", indicated the deep acrimony underlying this confrontation between the Labour Government and the current leaders of the movement which had put it in power. Fraser tried adroitly to divert attention to the danger of Japanese invasion. Nash stolidly defended the Government's economic policy. Only Webb was conciliatory throughout. . . By the end of two days, the unionists had talked themselves out, and Fraser (adopting Webb's approach) spoke of finding a way "to work smoothly with all concerned", and admitted that "the fact that we have always denounced war, and the fact that we now have to run one or get out, complicates matters." One unionist's last-minute attempt to raise the issue of worker participation in management as a boost to production was swept aside by Fraser: "Gentlemen, it's getting late. You have certainly given us something to think about. We will go carefully into all these matters. . . I am sure good is going to come of it." And he led them off to receive a briefing on the latest military situation over a map of the Pacific.

The F.O.L. Executive met Cabinet the following week, and within a few months big changes had taken place. New Economic Stabilisation Regulations had been gazetted, greatly increasing the power of Government to control prices; the

family benefit had been raised; an Economic Stabilisation Commission had been set up, with worker representation (and Walsh as its chairman); and McLagan, while retaining office as President of the F.O.L., had been appointed to the Upper House and taken into the Cabinet — at first without portfolio, but from October 1942 as Minister of National Service and Industrial Manpower!

It was a two-way coup. The Government had committed itself to a much more painstaking policy of controlling economic pressures and maintaining working class living standards — but it had also involved the trade unions leaders directly in the formulation and execution of that policy so that, whatever happened, they would collect as much of the blame from their members as the Government did.

For a while, the policy seemed to work. The rank and file seemed satisfied, while the continued opposition of the National Party at home and the fascist powers abroad maintained a level of working class identification with the Labour Government which reproduced the spirit of the 1930s. The degree of co-operation between the unions and the government induced a feeling close to complete national unity in the war effort. Isolated incidents continued, because this semblance of unity was unable to obliterate the fact that the conflict of interest between workers and employers still continued to exist. Militant workers — especially freezing workers and miners — continued to be restive, and there were still occasional stoppages among seamen as well.

When the *Omana* was held up in Lyttelton in February 1943 over a minor grievance, Fraser personally intervened, paying a visit to the Union's Executive Council (then in session) to explain that "owing to war developments, the British Cabinet had decided to take all produce ships off the New Zealand run and divert them to South America. This meant that necessary commodities, already in short supply, would no longer be arriving. Our own shipping was quite insufficient to meet this need, and every hour's delay to such ships as we possessed was a direct menace to the economic life of the people of New Zealand. Government would give every facility it could for the quick settlement of disputes *provided* that the ships were kept running." The alternative, he declared flatly, was "to man the vessels with Naval ratings". In the current dispute, the Prime Minister offered not only to call a compulsory conference with the shipowners, but to chair

it himself — a dramatic gesture which moved the recalcitrant crew into sailing at once.

Only once during the worst years of the war did a ship-board dispute prove intractable to the Prime Minister's terms for keeping the ships running. In the case of the *Karepo*, held up in Westport in 1943 over a demarcation dispute with watersiders concerning the removal of hatch-covers, a 24-hour delay in working the cargo resulted in the whole crew being drafted into the armed forces!

From early in the war, New Zealand ships began to be chartered by the Government for emergency duties, notably the transportation of troops, and New Zealand seamen were exposed to hazards even greater than the normal ones of war at sea. The *Awatea*, for instance, was subjected to bombing in the Mediterranean in the course of duty of this kind, resulting in a number of casualties to Union members. The *Komata* was sunk by shell-fire from raiders. A number of small coastal craft, including the *Hauraki* and the *Muritai*, were commissioned as minesweepers, and many Union members, taken into the Navy as T.124 ratings to man these ships, considerably upset the equipoise of the senior service by continuing to be outspoken about wages and conditions. A petition signed by a large number of T.124 ratings requesting an increase in Naval pay rates which had been set pre-war, was forwarded for action through the Union.

The captain of the *Monowai*, commissioned as an armed troop carrier, complained to Defence Headquarters that some of his crew "*have not taken to Navy discipline*". After intervention by Walsh and Fraser, a number of men were voluntarily released from the Navy into the merchant service. Meanwhile the *Puriri*, fully manned with former merchant seamen, was destroyed with considerable loss of life during a mine-sweeping operation just outside Auckland Harbour, and the *Hauraki*, crossing the Indian Ocean on a war mission, was captured by Japanese raiders and its entire crew taken prisoner and subjected to atrocities which were to feature in a War Crimes trial after the war ended.

During 1942, the Union joined with other maritime organisations in an approach to the authorities for firmer regulation of life-saving appliances and safety at sea. The Government expressed sympathy, but the following year a counter-approach by the Government for the amendment of the regulations in the direction of relaxing the annual survey of ships, as well as

loadlines and deck cargoes, was acceded to "*subject to the Prime Minister's assurance that seaworthiness of ships and safety of life will at all times be the first consideration*".

Recognition by the State of the invaluable national service being performed by merchant seamen, and the risks they were facing, came in mid-1943 with the granting of a special War Risk Gratuity of £6 monthly for each man to be paid into a National Savings Account. This was in addition to the War Risk Bonus paid in cash by the employer with each seaman's wages.

In 1944, a further hold-up on the West Coast provoked the Union leadership to rattle the bones of the dispute in the same ports ten years before. A dispute over the quality of coal supplied for bunkering the *Kaikorai* had been the subject of a meeting of all crews of ships currently in Westport, and it had been decided to take none of the vessels to sea until the men's demands were met — just as the National Party was mounting an attack in Parliament on the seamen's bonus and gratuity as "war-profiteering by the workers"! Tom Martin was sent across to Westport to "*bring the members there to a sense of their duty to the Union as a whole*", and a Union circular darkly reminded all members of what had happened to the "ringleader's" last time there was a sectional strike of crews on the West Coast!

Recommendations for improvements in working conditions, especially those relating to crews' accommodation, kept coming in from members during those years; but as the Executive Council decided in 1943, it would be a "futile gesture" to go for a new Award at that time. Still, a conference with the owners led to a number of undertakings being given as to improvements that would follow the cessation of hostilities. The conference was prompted by the fact that accommodation provided in American and other allied vessels then visiting New Zealand ports was so noticeably superior to that in local ships.

The successive victories of the allied powers over Nazi Germany and fascist Japan in 1945, and the final conclusion of peace after six years of war, brought tremendous relief to New Zealand seamen and their families. These men had faced continual hazards much more real than those faced by most New Zealanders during the war; many had given their lives; but the accumulation of industrial demands over the war period led to a development not unlike the bursting of a dam

as soon as war ended and the pressure of immediate dangers (including that from the punitive emergency regulations) was removed. Because of the close identification of the Union leadership with the Government and its policy of restrictive wartime measures against the industrial movement, pent-up resentment tended to be expressed against the Union's leaders as well as against the owners and the Government. Walsh himself never received a majority of less than several hundred in electoral contest for the Union presidency, except against a militant opponent in 1940; but in 1945, for the first time since the early thirties a leading spokesman for the militant opposition inside the organisation was elected onto the National Council.

In addition to a substantial wage increase, Union demands on the shipowners in 1945 included a 28-day pay month, a 3-hour overtime minimum, compensation by time-off for Sundays and holidays away from the home port, a 6-hour day in the tropics, heat and light available all night in crews' quarters, and refrigerators in messrooms. Difficulties with straight demands for an increase in wage rates resulted in successful negotiations for the extension of the war bonus under another name. Other improvements continued to be the subject of dispute.

In 1946, a conference with the shipowners on the application of the 40-hour week to the industry secured agreement on overtime pay for all Sunday work in port or at sea, and for all work in port after mid-day on Saturdays. Negotiations on the supply of heat and light, however, proved less satisfactory. The question had assumed less importance during the war in main ports, where continuous cargo-working necessitated the provision of electric power on board all night: but the restoration of "normal" working hours on the waterfront after the war brought the question back to the top of the agenda. At sea, of course, the turbines of oil-burning ships kept a continuous power supply.

During the war, when the question had been represented in relation to secondary ports, the Government had undertaken to ensure rapid reticulation of wharves as soon as materials were available, and a 1944 enactment empowered harbour boards to sell electricity to ships. In June 1946, the employers pleaded difficulty in obtaining the necessary equipment, and the crews of a number of ships, chiefly in Wellington and West Coast ports, decided not to put to sea until the demand

received a more satisfactory response. Referred to a special Tribunal under the emergency regulations (after expressions of support from the organisations of cooks and stewards and deck officers, as well as West Coast miners), the issue was fully debated, with the result that the men were guaranteed power in all ports up to 11 p.m.

The demand, however, had been for a 24-hour supply, and as the Wellington Union's stopwork meeting had resolved to continue the stoppage if the Tribunal decision was unfavourable, the hold-up went on until the Prime Minister himself offered to call a compulsory conference and personally chair it. Even then, many ships remained in Greymouth and Westport, until the delegates received identical personal telegrams from Fraser expressing "full sympathy with the men's demand, assuring them that *"everything possible will be done to instal at the earliest possible date the necessary equipment for maintaining heat and light aboard ships full time when they are in port,"* and undertaking that the promised conference would be held the following week "if the ships are taken to sea".

This high-level intervention ended the hold-up. The compulsory conference, formally opened by the Prime Minister, met in Parliament Buildings on 23rd and 24th July, and worked out detailed plans for the urgent completion of the work necessary to meet the men's demands in full — but this was only after an eloquent speech by Walsh, who said he had warned the employers in advance that on this issue "we would not be able to hold the men this winter", and that matters having gone as far as a stoppage "gave a certain sense of power to an irresponsible element who would play on it in the future".

This statement amounted to an announcement by Walsh of a continuation into the post-war period of the Union's wartime policy of close collaboration with the Labour Government, and of discouraging militant action by the rank and file. The policy was not, however, to be pursued at the expense of the just aspirations of the members for a fair deal in wages and conditions.

The cornerstone of this policy was the continuation of the Government's wartime programme of "economic stabilisation", and, as the FOL's representative on the Stabilisation Commission, Walsh sought to commit the whole trade union movement to supporting it with his famous "Walsh Report" to the Federa-

tion of Labour's National Council in 1946. Bitter division on this policy became the predominant feature of the New Zealand labour movement in the ensuing years. "Moderate" unions favouring it lined up against "militant" unions claiming that continued stabilisation meant the steady deterioration of working class living standards — until in 1950 the whole movement was split in two and the "militant" unions were annihilated (temporarily at least) in the industrial upheaval of 1951.

McLagan, increasingly criticised for the incompatibility of his dual role as Cabinet Minister with responsibility for relations with the unions and President of the FOL, finally resigned the latter position to be succeeded by the committed "moderate", shop assistants' leader Croskery. Efforts were made at this time to give coherence to trade union policy in the transport industry generally and the maritime section of it in particular with the foundation of a N.Z. Transport Workers Federation and a Waterfront Industry Central Committee, but neither proved effective against the irresistible tendency to open rupture between "moderates" and "militants". The watersiders were under increasingly bitter attack by the employers and the press for their militancy and its outstanding gains in wages and conditions which often had the effect of forcing bridgeheads for other sections of workers in their Arbitration Court Awards. A comparatively minor waterfront dispute in 1947 blew up, through the intransigence of the shipowners, into a national stoppage, and the Seamen's Union and the Cooks' and Stewards' Union, both anxious not to get involved and to minimise embarrassment to the Government, joined in urging the watersiders to return to work and hand over the dispute to the FOL.

1948 saw major industrial disputes by workers in the Cook Islands and carpenters in Auckland. Both had destructive repercussions on the unity of the FOL, and in both the leadership of the Seamen's Union threw its considerable weight in favour of "moderation". Auckland secretary Tom Anderson was appointed a member of a special FOL team which went to Rarotonga and recommended against supporting the militant Cook Islands Progressive Association (led by Albert Henry, later to become Cook Islands Premier): and the Seamen's Union's National Council declined to support the Carpenters' Union in its go-slow for the maintenance of wages and conditions on the grounds that when (in response to a threat from

the Minister of Labour, McLagan), the union had called for the Minister's resignation, this meant calling for "the restoration of a Tory administration"!

Inside the Seamen's Union, too, the leadership resumed its punitive policy towards militants. The same year, the National Council resolved that "where a hold-up of a ship is deemed by the Union to be unjustified", any members disregarding instructions "be required to show cause why they should not be dealt with". Following several hold-ups on colliers, the Union executive sent to stopwork meetings in all centres copies of a letter from the Minister of Mines urging the importance to the economy of the speedy turn-round of all vessels of this class.

Stoppages nevertheless continued, and when the *Kartigi* was held up in Westport later that year over a manning dispute, two members (including G. H. Anderson, later heard of elsewhere in the trade union movement) were expelled for inciting "raffertyism and mob rule". This incident led to a brief revival of an "Anti-Expulsion Committee", but its efforts were of no avail.

There were repeated signs of restiveness against the right-wing commitment of the Union in relation to general policy. There was a strong sentiment of opposition to the Government's mooted introduction of conscription in 1948 expressed at general meetings (and actually carrying the day in Auckland), but the Union remained committed to the Council's declared policy of support for the Fraser Government "in whatever measures they deem necessary for the defence of New Zealand". There was also support for the outspoken militancy of the carpenters and watersiders, and for the retention of New Zealand's link with the World Federation of Trade Unions (which was visibly splitting under the impact of the Cold War), but the Union's official policy of hostility to the extreme left, at home and abroad, continued to command majority support. Just how fragile this support was to prove when it came to a showdown involving basic union principles did not become clear until 1951 — but by then the damage had been done.

The seamen's industrial agreement of 1949, incorporating a recent general wage order, resulted in wage increases of £1 10s to £2 10s a month, but the employers proved intractable in their desire to limit the application of this increase to overtime rates, and the point had to be referred to the Arbitra-

tion Court — which granted marginally more than the employers' "final offer". In the same negotiations, the U.S.S.Co. flatly refused to upgrade crews' quarters, but agreed to consider providing heat and light in certain old ships "on their merits". There was also agreement on the general provision of refrigerators as installation became possible.

The most sensational event on the New Zealand coast that year was a strike declared by the Canadian Seamen's Union, which kept the *Tridale* tied up at Wellington for several months, with its crew imprisoned for a time, and precipitated a far-reaching dispute inside the local trade union movement. Walsh, who had been Vice-President of the FOL since the previous year, was absent in Britain when the strike began, negotiating prices for New Zealand's farm produce on behalf of the Stabilisation Commission — an appointment hailed by the National Council as "an honour to the Union". For some months, led by the Transport Workers' Federation, local union reaction to the Canadian strike was sympathetic: but events took a sharp turnabout with Walsh's return from abroad later in the year. The Seamen's Union dissociated itself from the Transport Workers' stand, and the FOL Executive condemned the strike as "part of a world-wide communist conspiracy". Even so, the *Tridale* strikers managed, with continued support from some local unions, to achieve certain minimum conditions for returning to work.

The *Tridale* strike, the Carpenters' go-slow, and the issue of conscription, had deepened the rifts in the New Zealand labour movement to breaking point. Correspondence between the Watersiders' Union and the FOL Executive on the carpenters' dispute had resulted in the threatened suspension of the watersiders from the Federation and a brief but dramatic walk-out by a large body of "militant" delegates from the 1949 FOL conference — which had been prevented, by adroit management, from even debating the conscription issue.

Fraser put conscription to a very one-sided referendum in August 1949, and won in the face of a bitterly divided Labour cause. A few months later, a General Election registered history's revenge: Labour lost power to the strident, bombastic National Party, led by S. G. Holland with a platform which included "putting the trade unions in their place".

The stage was set for the counter-attack on labour for which the employers had been itching for fourteen years.

15.

THE EMPLOYERS' COUNTERATTACK AND THE THIRD GREAT STRIKE: 1950-51

History is often ironical, and she played a grim joke on the New Zealand labour movement in the years 1950 and 1951.

The tensions produced in the trade unions by 14 years of Labour Government had no precedent since the days of the "Red Fed" revolt against arbitration under the Liberals in the early 1900s. The bulk of the unions, basking under advantages they would never have enjoyed without a Labour Government (including, in some cases, their very existence!) were quite content to accept the confinements of stabilisation and arbitration, and to play the game according to the rules laid down by the Labour politicians. But a restive minority — mainly the older and larger industrial unions — continued to regard stabilisation as a fraud and arbitration as a leg-iron. They thumbed their noses at the counsels of "moderation", and combined to use their collective strength to the point of direct action in bargaining to win gains for their members which could certainly never have been achieved in terms of the accepted rules.

The irony was that the open rupture between the two groups, though it often seemed close enough, did not actually become a fact until after the Labour Government had been voted out of office, and the reinstatement of an anti-Labour Government made the unity of the trade union movement more urgent than ever. The unions had been plagued with similar divisions when the Liberals lost power in 1912, but whereas they had faced up to the threat of the Massey Government at that time with movement towards unity and the closing of their ranks, their first reaction to the threat of the Holland Government was a tragic decision to split asunder. The decision of the FOL conference in 1950 to empower the Executive to expel the Waterside Workers Union for its refusal to withdraw a year-old letter accusing the Executive of betraying the carpenters, provoked a massive

walk-out of 60-odd delegates, and the formation of a rival national body, the Trade Union Congress.

In deciding which of the two sides to follow, the Seamen's Union (like many other unions caught in the crossfire) was overwhelmingly influenced by its dominant leaders. Walsh, as an influential member of the FOL Executive, was not only committed to its "moderate" position, but was its best known advocate, as well as the most vocal excoriator of the "militants". As events were to prove, the rank and file seamen were far from being enamoured of the industrial policy of their president, but until these events precipitated a state of national crisis, the issues were never posed clearly enough inside the Union to invite the rejection of that policy. Time and again, the seamen confirmed their belief in trade union unity — but in the context of the time this was ambiguous. When the split came, each side claimed to be the sole promoter of unity, and accused the other side of disruption. With the benefit of nearly two decades of hindsight, it is hard to judge impartially the accuracy of these rival claims and accusations. It takes two sides to make any quarrel, and when both are equally convinced of their absolute rightness and equally impervious to the obvious fact that their differences are of infinitely less consequence than their identity of interest against a common enemy, then the quarrel is not only inevitable but irremediable.

This was the hopeless situation in which the movement found itself at a time when the employers, flexing their muscles with the assurance of sympathetic government support for the first time in a decade and a half, set their mind to the task of turning the clock back on the advances achieved by the wage-earners in fourteen years of Labour government.

The National Government was no sooner installed than it commenced dismantling the delicate mechanism of such stabilisation as Labour had been successful in establishing. The unionists who had voiced uneasiness at the way stabilisation was weighted against the wage-earners soon found that there were policies very much worse. Subsidies were removed from basic foods, price control was uplifted from numerous goods and services, land sales control was abolished, student bursaries were pruned . . . and the wage-earners' cost of living rose sharply, assisted by the inflationary effects of the war which broke out in Korea in mid-1950.

In these circumstances, a rash of industrial unrest was only

to be expected, and this was exactly what a key section of employers desired: the excuse for a showdown. The shipowners, especially, were anxious for the chance of a duel to the death with the watersiders, whose industrial activities had been causing such widespread shudders through the whole cumbrous machinery of wage-fixing; and the shipowners' wishes were shared by the brash new government and significant sections of its supporters, especially the farming and commercial community for whom watersiders' wages were merely a burdensome impost on the cost of their exports and imports. Beyond doubt, another valuable ally of the shipowners was the assiduously peddled press image of the watersiders as truculent and indolent toughs. Expelled by the FOL, the Watersiders' Union faced the onslaught isolated, along with a handful of other militant organisations, from the bulk of the trade union movement.

A preliminary skirmish over a reduction in watersiders' penal rates for handling lampback in September 1950 was settled in a matter of days — though not before the Government had prepared to declare a state of national emergency in terms of the panic law of 1932, the Public Safety Conservation Act. Then, in December, a flat refusal by Government to raise the wages of railwaymen in terms of a long-standing and well substantiated claim led to a national rail strike over Christmas, with maximum dislocation to holiday transport.

Both these disputes ended in compromise, but in each case the workers obtained a substantial proportion of what they were seeking. This may have given the watersiders' leaders a false optimism concerning their chances in a future stoppage. Such optimism was fortified by the fact that, small as it was, the TUC had probably secured the affiliation of a majority of the country's active and militant unions — and by the firm belief that the FOL would not dare to oppose them in a dispute involving reprisal by a Tory (as opposed to a Labour) Government.

The false basis of this optimism became apparent only too late. By then, the watersiders had been carefully manoeuvred into a position from which they could not extricate themselves without their own organisation being smashed and the whole labour movement irreparably damaged.

As in 1890 and 1913, the shipowners had long been preparing for the day of reckoning, utterly determined to stamp

out militant unionism and the improvements it was able to win for its rank and file by the tactical use of the strategic contribution of its supporters to the national economy. The watersiders were deliberately goaded into taking a mild form of direct action (which was promptly converted by the employers into a total stoppage) at a time when the watersiders were cut off from many traditional allies, and when the whole might of the State was at the virtual disposal of the ship-owners.

The issue, though one in which the watersiders were clearly in the right, was too complex to be presented in the form of a popular watchword. Despite a wave of consequential and sympathetic stoppages by other key unions, the watersiders were literally crushed by the Government — first, by laying down a specific form of arbitration as the condition of peace; then, when this was accepted, by insisting that the watersiders' elected leaders should be replaced as their spokesmen; and finally, when even this outrageous condition seemed conceivable, by laying it down that their national organisation accept permanent fragmentation into 26 local splinters. And even then, after 151 days of relentless industrial warfare, the watersiders announced their return to work "supremely confident . . . to fight again" . . . But it took more than ten years to rebuild their shattered organisation to anything like its old bargaining strength. For the moment, at least, the employers and their pliant Government succeeded in their intentions: militant unionism was defeated.

The 1951 waterfront dispute was the third big strike in which the New Zealand Seamen's Union has been involved in the course of its history, and it is necessary to recount its essential details. Its origins lay in the General Wage Order of February 1951, which granted a 15% increase on all Award rates other than those granted as "interim" increases since the last general order. The shipowners immediately declared that an increase granted to watersiders late in 1950 was to be regarded as "interim" (although its terms stated that it was "not an interim decision but a final decision") and that they were prepared to grant watersiders only a further 9%. Watersiders were indignant, because this not only destroyed long-standing relativities between them and other groups of workers, but also because they were calmly told that their total take-home pay would still compare favourably with that of others because of the long overtime hours they work-

ed! Their overtime work — involving the surrender of the leisure guaranteed them by law — was being offered as a reason for holding down their hourly rate!

Reacting to the crazy logic of this argument, the watersiders decided to cut out overtime altogether. Stopwork meetings of watersiders at all ports called on the employers to meet the Union in conciliation proceedings on the issue, and resolved to cease all overtime work as from 14 February until their demands were met. The employers claimed that this was a breach of the watersiders' standing agreement, though this (in conformity with the law which guaranteed the 40-hour week) specifically permitted every individual watersider to refuse overtime if he wished to! When the men offered themselves for work the following week they were confronted by notices reading: "Work is offered subject to acceptance of normal hours including overtime if required". They were flatly refused any work unless they foreswore their collective decision not to work overtime until the wages dispute had been satisfactorily resolved. . . . The result was that the entire labour force on the New Zealand waterfronts was locked out by the employers. The fight for which the employers had long been spoiling was definitely on. . . .

Two days later, the Government decided to take a hand. Prime Minister Holland was absent abroad (consecutively visiting London for a Commonwealth Conference, and Washington for Korean War talks — where he distinguished himself by declaring that New Zealand would "follow the United States through thick and thin, right and wrong"), and leadership devolved on the second best in a poor field, his deputy, Holyoake, who frankly admitted "I don't know much about industrial matters". Despite his ignorance, he summoned a conference of Port Employers' and Waterside Workers' representatives, in an apparent attempt to sort out some formula for resolving the dispute — but if this was Holyoake's real intention, it is hard to see why it failed so signally. He opened proceedings by suggesting that the dispute be submitted to arbitration. The employers claimed to agree, but stated that the only arbitrating authorities they were prepared to consider were the defunct Waterfront Industry Authority (which the watersiders had boycotted ever since it had provoked two disputes late in 1950) and a Royal Commission currently considering general waterfront matters (and whose terms of reference emphatically excluded its acting as an arbitrator in

any specific dispute). The Union, on the other hand, proposed that the Government should compel the employers to meet the Union in conciliation, and that, failing agreement, a compulsory conference should be called under the chairmanship of industrial magistrate Gilmour, who had helped resolve several previous disputes in the maritime industry in this way, and was renowned for the firmness and fairness of his chairmanship.

The Union's proposals — which were the only realistic ones made to Holyoake for the peaceful settlement of the trouble — were rejected out of hand by the employers: so what did Holyoake do? Did he compel the employers to swallow them in the interests of industrial harmony and the national economy? On the contrary, he decided to prolong the trouble indefinitely by giving the watersiders an ultimatum: to resume "normal work" (with overtime) by Monday 19th February, on pain of having all standing agreements in the industry suspended by the Government, plus "further steps" which he did not specify — perhaps on account of the industrial ignorance of which he had boasted.

So the fight was not only "on", but it was pronounced by the Government to be insoluble. From this point, the watersiders were to be faced with the opposition not only of the employers, but of the State as well — and the terms for a truce were to become whatever the whim of the moment might move the politicians to decide: and these terms were to shift and change, being consistent only in always containing some element which was well known to be currently unacceptable to the watersiders.

On Monday 19th February, all branches of the watersiders' union having voted to ignore the ultimatum, the lockout was complete. Next day the Government legalised the employers' lawless action by suspending all waterfront agreements. Two days later the Government invoked the Public Safety Conservation Act and declared a "state of emergency", gazetting nine pages of Emergency Regulations the following Monday to impose a legalized dictatorship which had (in the words of one academic historian) "no parallel for severity in the English-speaking world".

Under these fantastic Regulations, it was declared to be an offence to "aid or abet" a "declared" strike, and the word "strike" was so defined as to include "the act of any number

of workers . . . in discontinuing employment whether wholly or partially and whether by refusing or failing to work overtime or otherwise" and "any reduction in the normal output of workers in their employment"! Pickets were made liable to arrest without warrant, processions and meetings subject to prohibition if a police officer was satisfied that they were "likely to be injurious to the public safety or the public interest", police were given unlimited right of entry to private premises on suspicion that an offence under the Regulations was being committed there. Any form of aid to strikers or their families, and the public expression of any sympathy with the purpose of a strike — or even the simple statement of the strikers' case — were made offences subject to summary penalty.

By 28th February, the Waterside Workers Union was "de-registered" in terms of the Labour Government enactment used against the Carpenters' Union in 1949, and the following day troops were marched onto the waterfront in main ports to load and unload the ships. Immediately the seamen were faced with the necessity of an urgent decision. The first ship to tie up at Wellington on 29th February was the *Kauri*, and Dan MacLeod (who had become General Secretary of the Union after Newfield's death in 1948) was soon alongside as gangs of Air Force personnel were being formed up to open the hatches. His simple instructions to the delegate were: "There's no need to tell you what to do."

The delegate soon found what the crew thought about working with scab labour, but when he went back to get clarification of the Union's attitude, MacLeod was gone. He telephoned the Union office, and Walsh (who as Vice-President of the FOL had led the attack which had resulted in the isolation of the WWU) told him crisply: "Your industrial duty is not to do a thing. Sit tight till they sack you."

Other workers soon found themselves involved in the dispute of necessity also, and others took such strong exception to the dictatorial powers and obliteration of hard won traditional trade union freedoms in the Regulations that they took strike action as the only possible form of protest. Miners, freezing workers, drivers, general labourers stopped work. Before the end of March there were to be more than 20,000 men out. Far from trying to find a solution, the Government seemed intent on broadening and prolonging it.

Holland came bouncing home from his world jaunt and took charge of operations for the smashing of effective union-

ism. The FOL National Executive called a series of special conferences of affiliated unions likely to be affected, and organised a number of deputations to the Prime Minister — but by 14th March, Holland had made it quite clear that he was not interested in what he called “a mere resumption of work”. He laid down a 7-point basis for settlement, which demanded a large measure of reorganisation of the waterfront industry, including permanent instead of casual employment, open membership for waterside unions, and secret ballots on all strike issues. The watersiders’ acceptance of arbitration, in place of the reasonable form of conciliation which they had proposed, was no longer an issue. . . . The Government had slammed the door on normal industrial negotiations.

The National Executive of the FOL saw fit to endorse Holland’s seven points, and when the watersiders rejected them (with support from the freezingworkers and miners) the FOL issued a statement on 21st March washing its hands of the whole dispute and calling on all unionists to “resume normal work”. Considerable tension developed between the FOL Executive and the Labour Party when the Labour MPs (led, since Fraser’s death in December 1950, by Walter Nash) declined to endorse this statement.

As Vice-President of the FOL, Walsh played a significant role in that body’s decisions on the dispute, but he experienced rather more difficulty in persuading the members of the Seamen’s Union to follow the same policy. The day after the lockout had begun, an impromptu meeting of members at the Government Shipping Office in Wellington had decided to march in a body to the Union Office, where the National Council was sitting, and demand to know what stand the Union was taking. The following day (28th February), Walsh told a special stopwork meeting in Wellington: “Members have no right to invade the Union office in the mass, particularly when their elected officials are deliberating on a situation of grave import to our Union. . . It is necessary at all times, but especially in such a crisis as this, to act as an organised, disciplined body of Unionists. There is a small section of members whose objective is to sow confusion. If their efforts succeed, the result would be that in place of an orderly resolute body, there will be a disorganized rabble.” A resolution was then carried endorsing a Council recommendation to continue normal work, refuse to supply steam or any other work in connection with loading or discharging by

other than union labour, and approving the FOL proposals for settlement.

As the dispute dragged on, with the Government (to whom the shipowners declared they had "handed over") flatly refusing to meet the watersiders' elected leaders and the Regulations prohibiting the publication of the watersiders' side of the story, more and more workers became involved willy-nilly, and increasing numbers of them called for some dramatic move by their organisations to bring about the rapid settlement in which the Government was obviously not interested. Late in March, the Council of the Seamen's Union met again, and resolved to conduct a national plebiscite of members by secret ballot on the FOL recommendation to "resume normal work" — which would have meant deserting the watersiders and working with scab labour. Leaflets circulated among seamen by rank and file militants urged: *"No secret ballot can make us clean if it tells us to scab"*.

The regular monthly stopwork meetings were due to be held in all ports on 3rd April, but the Head Office Executive announced that it could not find a suitable hall in Wellington on that date. It may have been a coincidence that the massive pile-up of ships in port had meant an unusually large crowd of members ashore in the capital. Taking affairs into their own hands, 265 of these men met at Trades Hall, voted no confidence in their officials' "so-called attempts to acquire a meeting hall", and also registered their "total opposition to secret ballots" (both with only two dissentients), and went on to resolve unanimously that they would return to work only on the repeal of the emergency regulations, on the Government agreeing to meet the watersiders' elected leaders on the basis of an honourable settlement, and the re-registration of all de-registered unions.

In Dunedin, also, the "secret ballot" proposal was rejected, by 39 to 3, and things fared little differently at Auckland.

Walsh was finally persuaded to chair an official stopwork meeting in Wellington on 5th April, and although the Council recommendation was forcefully supported from the chair, it was rejected by 149 votes to 207.

The following day, Nash issued a strong attack on the emergency regulations. He declared that it was up to the Government to call a compulsory conference for the immediate settlement of the dispute, but pointed out that the democratic resolution of the problem "under conditions of open discus-

sion" was impossible while citizens were prevented from "speaking in public about the conditions relative to the waterfront dispute" and while it was "a criminal offence to contribute in cash or kind for the benefit of a watersider of his family". This statement, and the open espousal of the watersiders' cause by a number of Labour MPs, sharpened the tension between the Labour Party and the FOL leadership.

Meanwhile, an approach to the Prime Minister in search of a settlement by the TUC, through its secretary A. B. Grant, had run aground on Holland's offended refusal to negotiate further when Grant had said the Prime Minister's tactics in dealing with the watersiders were "neither just, nor fair, nor honourable". Holland flatly declined to entertain repeated proposals by Nash and the TUC for a compulsory conference.

The new policy of the Seamen's Union was submitted to stopwork meetings in all four centres on 10th April, and national totals revealed 647 to 232 in favour of returning to work only on the basis of an honourable settlement of the wharf dispute and recognition of the watersiders' elected leaders. The motion was carried unanimously in Wellington and Lyttelton. To cement unity, a rank and file strike committee were deputed to sit with the Executive Council in any deliberations on the stoppage. All members who had not yet been affected by the dispute and were still employed were immediately directed to give notice and leave their jobs individually "without indication that their action was under Union direction" — a decision influenced by the Government's apparent determination to deregister every organisation which allied itself with the wicked watersiders. The seamen were now out on strike, to a man, alongside their traditional allies.

By Union decision, the salaries of all officials ceased immediately, and relief pay was fixed on the basis of 30s a week for all single members and £3 for married members, with further relief to be considered on its merits — as in cases of mortgage commitments and large families. At first all payments were met out of the Union's general funds, but it was not long before appeals were made to other unions and among the general public, despite the illegality of such appeals in terms of the Regulations. A letter to the Seamen's Union of Australia obtained the return of the £2,000 loaned to that organisation by the Union back in 1922.

In its new mood, the Union was unlikely not to have ques-

tioned the part its own General President had played in the FOL's policy towards the dispute from its inception. At stop-work meetings, he was sharply confronted with his own reported statements, including one telling Australian unionists not to contribute financially to the N.Z. watersiders. Walsh declared he was misreported. A move to have the Union disaffiliate from the FOL was countered by his assurance that it would need a plebiscite vote and take three months to be effective, and the matter was "deferred" until after the stoppage.

Seamen joined in a number of combined activities with the watersiders and other striking workers in each port. Relief was increasingly organised jointly, as was publicity. When British seamen were ordered to do normal watersiders' work on the *Rangitikei* in Auckland, seamen and watersiders joined in appealing to them: "You wouldn't scab on the London dockers, so don't scab on ours".

Late in April, Nash announced that the Watersiders Union had now stated it would accept arbitration on the wages issue and on Holland's seven points. It was clearly the Government that was refusing to arbitrate, he declared. *"Whatever alterations are required to ensure efficiency on the waterfront cannot be achieved by coercion and repression"*.

The FOL's annual conference, meeting in Wellington from 24th to 27th April, was described by two delegates who attended as having "in its attitude towards the present industrial trouble, tended to support the present Tory Government in its intimidating attitude towards the workers. . . . On several occasions, delegates endeavoured to have the question of the 'Emergency Regulations' debated, but their right on this question was denied. . . ." The conference carried a long resolution blaming the entire dispute on "the persistent refusal of the watersiders to accept the principle of conciliation and arbitration" and "the isolationist policy of the watersiders . . . under the direct control of the international communist party". (Nash was later rebuked by the FOL for declaring that "all this talk about communism is humbug" — though he was clearly referring to the Government's ceaseless barrage of irrational propaganda against the strikers rather than any statement of the FOL.)

The conference also rejected a request by the Seamen's Union, conveyed via Walsh, that the watersiders' leaders Barnes and Hill should be invited to attend "with a view to

joining forces to settle the dispute". Barnes and Hill were the waterfront leaders whom Holland had suddenly decided he would no longer recognise just after the trouble began. Jock Barnes, president of the WWU, was basically a syndicalist in the I.W.W. tradition. A trained survey-draughtsman who had lost a Public Service job during the depression through Labour Party activities, and had been rebuffed by the Labour Government in all attempts to have it restored to him, he had no time for politicians of any colour. Toby Hill, a Glasgow born left-wing militant, was secretary of the WWU. Their policy, which was to call on their members to back them up with action whenever they met a snag in negotiations with the employers, was the very essence of the "irresponsibility" of which the FOL leadership so strongly disapproved. Walsh summed it up by declaring that Barnes and Hill (in implied contrast to himself) "seem to have no control whatever over their members". Both Barnes and Hill were witty and fluent speakers, and both enjoyed a heartily reciprocated antipathy towards Walsh.

Early in May, the press made a sensational news item out of what appeared to be an unsuccessful attempt to dynamite a small bridge on a railway siding to one of the Waikato mines which was being worked with scab labour. Close on the tail of this atrocity yarn came Holland's call to "all able-bodied men" to help "preserve law and order" by joining a Civil Emergency Reserve. With uncomfortable awareness of the rather absurd spectacle which the "specials" of 1913 were already making in literature and legend, "able-bodied men" showed little enthusiasm for this attempt to involve them in Holland's "cold war". Wellington drivers, who had refused to handle scab goods from the wharf, were ordered to put the issue to a secret ballot — and because it went overwhelmingly in favour of continuing this policy, their Union was deregistered early in May.

On 2nd May, the watersiders, freezingworkers and drivers of Wellington planned a march from Trades Hall to Parliament to publicise their case, but were stopped by a police cordon at Dixon Street and dispersed after some incidents involving baton-swinging by the police. The Seamen's Union decided, at its stopwork meeting the same morning, not to cut the meeting short to participate officially in the march, on Walsh's assurance that to do so would be "the sort of illegal act the Government is looking for to deregister us and seize

our funds". A number of seamen still took a prominent part in the demonstration.

On 5th May occurred the incident which rang around the world and alerted a rather dozey public opinion to the really vicious nature of the Regulations which the Holland Government had clamped down on the country. Nash was prevented from speaking on the dispute in the Auckland Town Hall. His own mild comment, "Nothing worse has ever taken place in a British country", was soon surpassed by the shocked reaction of overseas observers. Inside New Zealand, where the houses of a few hundred wharfies and seamen had been searched, the offices and safes of a few unions had been burgled by the "special" branch, and small communities of miners made the victims of the sadism of a few police officers, the Regulations meant little to the great majority of people — until they saw the respected Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition gagged in case he might say something that didn't suit the Government's peculiar line.

The uneasy role in which Walsh found himself, as leader of a Union fighting alongside the Watersiders' Union which he had done so much to isolate, came into sharp relief with the appearance, among the wealth of "underground" cyclo-styled broadsheets which were the natural outcome of the Government's ban on publicity for the strikers' case, of a pamphlet specifically denouncing him and his activities in the trade union movement. This resulted in the Union's deciding to withdraw from the joint Publicity Committee set up by the striking and locked out unions in Wellington.

On 15th May, the Government announced the proposed formation of separate wharf unions at each port, and called on members of the deregistered union to apply individually to return to work with a single right of appeal if rejected. The union rejected the call, reiterating its conditions for a return to work as repeal of the regulations, re-registration of the union, recognition of its elected leaders, a compulsory conference and no victimisation. A joint conference between the watersiders', seamen's, and cooks' and stewards' unions to discuss the situation opened in May during a meeting of the Seamen's National Council, but broke down on the mutual antipathy of Walsh and Barnes, the latter declining to discuss strike policy in the absence of representatives of the striking miners and freezing workers. A large crowd of seamen and watersiders cheered Barnes as he left the Seamen's Union

office, and the national Council resumed its session to call on the Watersiders to "face up to the situation and advise their members to adopt the only course now open to them", namely "to return to work wherever possible".

The stopwork meeting of the Union on 24th May, however resolved that the Union "recommend to the FOL to call a general strike to bring the watersiders' dispute to finality". Walsh explained to a meeting the following week that this had "not proved possible".

At this point, for all the Government blatherskite about the more rapid operation of scab labour on the wharves, the overseas shipping companies announced a 50% surcharge on all New Zealand freights, which evoked immediate condemnation from farmers' organisations — at least one of which demanded that the Government consider launching a State Shipping Line to break the monopoly grip. The illegal bulletin commented wryly that the increase "did not have to go to Conciliation and Arbitration".

Scab wharf unions were now operating in most ports, and especially in smaller ports locked-out watersiders were being driven back into employment by the harsh facts of economics and intimidation. Despite the regulations, there was a steady flow of financial support, as well as gifts of food and firewood — but it was limited by the fact that most of the country's militant unionists were themselves on strike and in need of such help. Publicity for the strikers' case, though sometimes crude enough in the "underground" form to which the regulations largely reduced it, had been effective in producing help wherever it was able to be explained orally and in greater detail — but this had so far been restricted to the meetings of a few other unions and such havens of independent thinking as the universities. It had become urgently necessary to get the message across to a wider public. The regulations had flooded the tame press and State-owned radio with a one-way torrent of pro-Government propaganda. This helped ensure the permanence of the bitter split in the labour movement, for it included anti-watersider speeches by such leading Labour figures as Bob Semple and P. M. Butler.

It was finally decided to simply defy the law and see what happened. Town Halls in main centres were hired for Sunday 20th May in the name of individuals, and publicity issued in hand-out form invited the public to come and hear the version of events they had been prevented from hearing for

three months. The result was extraordinary. 3,000 people thronged the Wellington meeting to hear Hill; 4,000 overflowed the Auckland Town Hall to hear Barnes and Archie Baxter, Waikato miners' leader and former Labour MP. Rank and file seamen's representatives took a place on the platform at both meetings. "*The iron curtain is broken*", declared Hill.

Still the scab unions went on growing, and funds steadily reduced to a trickle. Other means of publicity were sought almost desperately. In Auckland, a march through the centre of the city on Friday 1st June was organised to publicise an open-air meeting the following Sunday: but the police had been instructed that such processions were still illegal, and a cordon of uniformed and plain clothes police blocked the street and bludgeoned enough of the front ranks to break up the march, and hard enough for several workers to require hospital treatment. The iron curtain was evidently not broken. The publicity breakthrough was too little and too late.

There was increasing concern now among the seamen and other unionists on strike to receive reliable information on the day-to-day position of the scab wharf unions and a realistic assessment of the chances of achieving anything by prolonging the stoppage. By mid-June, the Australian watersiders' union, faced with vindictive legal action for extending further industrial assistance, was forced to start handling scab-loaded cargoes from New Zealand.

A national meeting of all unions directly involved in the dispute was held in Wellington on 13th June and heard a report from Barnes on the scab union position. Seamen's representatives assured the meeting: "We don't go back until the watersiders receive a satisfactory settlement. . . We would rather tighten our belts than change our principles." A resolution was carried to make a further approach to Nash to try and obtain a settlement based on no victimisation and the repeal of the regulations — but Holland was now quite content to rest his faith on the scabs, and was no more interested in a settlement than he had ever been.

The Seamen's Union Council met again with the strike committee representatives at the end of June, and invited Barnes and Hill to discuss the current situation. The seamen were able to report only four members caught scabbing, compared with a very large proportion of defectors from the watersiders' ranks. The miners were now negotiating for a return to work in most areas, and the seamen appealed to

the watersiders to "face reality", go back to work where possible, and try to beat "screening" on the job "as the seamen had to do in 1923".

"There's a limit to what the workers can endure," declared Walsh, *"and when that limit is reached it is sound leadership to retreat and rebuild."* A further conference between the unions broke up in a verbal explosion between Barnes and miners' president Prendiville (who had been restored to office following a long period of suspension for refusing to support the strike decision of his Union's National Council). Finally, meeting again on 4th July, the seamen's enlarged Council resolved that "further sacrifices by our members in support of what is unattainable cannot be justified", and recommended that members offer themselves for employment. The resolution was put to meetings in each centre on 6th July, as a joint recommendation of the National Executive and Strike Committees, and carried. Even so, seamen in Wellington, some of them old enough to remember the hard feelings that followed the circumstances of a divided return to work in 1913, agreed to return only on 11 July after they had heard assurances given by the watersiders' leaders that their union, too, was calling an end to the stoppage and urging its members to infiltrate the new unions and fight victimisation and scabbery from within the industry. Only after this announcement was Holland's "state of emergency" lifted and the dictatorial regulations repealed.

Few of the organisations involved in the epic struggle of 1951 came through with as proud a record as the Seamen's Union. Much as some of its leaders disapproved of the strike, the Union's total membership had amongst it only a handful who proved ineligible to have the Loyalty Stamp entered in their books. More significantly, perhaps, the Union came through the dispute with its organisation intact and its registration still in force.

The immediate after-effects of the strike were many and predictable. The smashed unions took years to rebuild their strength. The TUC was a spent force, and its erstwhile affiliates came dribbling back into the FOL — not so much chastened and subdued, as determined to use harder-headed methods for putting their militancy into effect in the future, and above all to maintain the unity of the movement.

The Tory Government, riding high on what it trumpeted forth as the "defeat" of the watersiders (variously described

as "Barnes and Hill", "the wreckers", and "the Communist dupes"), dissolved Parliament, called a snap election, and romped back again with only a few hundred more votes but four more seats — the biggest majority a Tory Government was ever to win, won on a blatant confidence trick. Four days later, the overseas shipping trusts announced a further 15% increase in freight rates. About the same time it was revealed, in evidence given to the Royal Commission on the Waterfront Industry, that the shipowners had donated at least £1,500 to establishing the scab watersiders' union in Auckland alone.

The Holland Government attempted to celebrate its success by writing some of the worst provisions of the Emergency Regulations into the permanent law of the land — in a Police Offences Amendment Bill which sought to reverse accepted judicial procedures, make suspects prove their own innocence, extend the definition of "sedition" to include almost any dissent from Government policy, and cancel hardwon civil liberties. The Government was clearly surprised at the depth and extent of opposition to its draft law, which came even from organisations as conservative as the Law Society: but even so, many of the Bill's worst features were made law.

It was evident that the workers had a long battle ahead of them, political as well as industrial, to win back all that had been lost in the tragic events of 1950 and 1951.

16.

RETURN TO OLD PERSPECTIVES: since 1951

After 1951, nothing in the trade union movement was ever quite the same again. The Seamen's Union, having reasserted its militancy on a national scale for the first time in nearly twenty years, and being the only major union involved in the dispute to emerge organisationally intact, found itself cast in a new role — or, rather, re-cast in an old role — as an industrial pace-setter; and a leftward shift by the Seamen's Union was reflected in the trade union movement as a whole.

The FOL leadership soon found that with the old "militant" opposition of the 40s now absent from the Federation, or returning in a somewhat changed mood, the duties of defending the interests of wage-earners under a Tory Government required them to adopt an increasingly militant approach.

Unsurpassed as a shrewd old campaigner, Walsh proved himself perfectly adaptable to this leftward swing in his own Union, and in the FOL (of which he was president after Croskery's death in 1953). By the time of his own death in 1963, he had firmly re-established his image in the minds of most New Zealanders as the sort of fire-eating militant he had been forty years before.

The Seamen's Union attacked the inadequacy of the Arbitration Court's 1952 "Standard Wage Pronouncement" as "a damaging blow to the principle of conciliation", although negotiations won for seamen a monthly increase varying from £1 for boys to over £2 for ABs. The rises were overdue: but the Union needed a rise too, and subs had to be lifted by 5s a quarter to 25s the following year. (They had to be raised another 5s seven years later.)

The U.S.S.Co. warned the Union late in 1953 that increasing competition from air transport in the trans-Pacific and island trade was making these services uneconomic and that they might have to be discontinued. Discussion of the problem at the Union Council tended to blame the wharf strike and wildcat stoppages by ships' crews for this development,

but Walsh broadened the perspective by pointing to the inevitability of such changes and the need for the Union to "*face sooner or later the question of shrinking job opportunities*" for its members. An effort was made the following year to have a number of U.S.S.Co. vessels running on the trans-Pacific trade transferred from Canadian to N.Z. articles. In November 1954, the *Viti*, operated by the liquidators of the defunct Tasman Co., arrived in Lyttelton from Rarotonga with a cargo of pineapples and a Pacific Island crew paid well under the NZ rate. When the owners declined to pay the full rate, the Union succeeded in getting agreement among the maritime unions to have the ship declared "black" — an incident which must have seemed ironical to the seamen after what Captain Clough Blair has described as the sort of complaints made to the Tasman Co. when it was operating the *Viti*: he claimed that Walsh ordered him to stop serving "chicken and champagne" to the crew, as members were demanding similar treatment on other ships!

The new awareness of union responsibilities was shown in Walsh's presidential address to the 1954 FOL conference, in which he deplored "the growing dependence of many trade unions upon the State to police and enforce the conditions of their awards", and called on them to do the job for themselves.

The Union farewelled an old stalwart in 1956 when Bill Clarke declined to seek re-election as either Dunedin secretary or National Councillor. Over seventy, Bill had held the Dunedin position since 1917 and been on the Council (with a single break for Army service in World War I) since the year before the 1913 Strike. It was time, he said, to "roll over and make room for the next generation", and though George MacLeod was elected to succeed him in the Dunedin office, Bill has gone on (to this time of writing) taking a close interest in the affairs of the Union.

The Union still took a firm line with members who took action contrary to policy. When the *Tamahine* was held up by an unofficial stoppage in October 1956 over the number of men on watch in the engine-room, the Union instructed them to work in accordance with the Award. Though they failed to respond to this direction, or to see the error of their ways until after they had signed off in a body, the Union obtained their jobs back for them when they acknowledged their mistake four days later.

However, the Union was equally firm, when a point of principle arose, as in the refusal of the U.S.S.Co. to pay certain wages due to two seamen paid off the *Tamahine* when she went out of commission at the end of 1956, the Union refused to supply a crew for the ship at all when she was brought back into service in March 1957, and the Company had to break all contracts for its normal Wellington-Picton service. The Company had in fact simply ignored the claim, but tried to blame the Union for not having submitted the dispute to arbitration! Two days later a solution was found, and the ship sailed.

The Union came under some press criticism for both these incidents, but even more so in 1957 for its defence of a member who claimed to have been assaulted by his controlling officer in the engine-room of the *Maori*, which consequently missed one round trip from Wellington to Lyttelton and back. The crew struck in protest against a Magistrate's acquittal of the officer on the assault charge, and the ship sailed only after the Company agreed to the issue being re-heard by an arbitrator (who held that there had been an assault, and awarded the seaman £300 damages). The tone of press comment was dismay at the new role of Walsh — who had been "so responsible" in 1951!

The Tory Government fell from office in the general elections that year as the climax of increasing unease at the spiralling cost of living, narrowly defeated by Labour. The new Government, with Nash as Prime Minister, was immediately faced with a crisis caused by the Nationalists' free-spending import policy, which had been the subject of sober warnings by Walsh in his capacity of FOL president. The Labour Government's method of dealing with the crisis in its famous "black budget" was also criticised by Walsh, with the backing of the Union, as unfair to wage-earners. Some observers wondered what "political game" Walsh was playing; but others saw it merely as a sign of the greater militancy and independence of the trade union movement he led, and its refusal to get involved again (as it had in the past) in economic policies which might prove deleterious to its membership. Soon after this, the press was commenting adversely on the sudden absence of a "cold war" anti-communist tone in Walsh's presidential address to the FOL conference.

The Union expressed concern again in 1958 at the laying up of successive U.S.S.Co. ships from the trans-Pacific trade,

and at the Company's refusal to honour an earlier undertaking to transfer its three Canadian-manned vessels to NZ articles when crews could now easily be supplied. The FOL's support was obtained in representations to Government to remove cheap labour ships chartered by the CSR sugar monopoly for the bulk cartage of its product to New Zealand, formerly done by U.S.S.Co. ships with NZ crews. Nash promised to investigate the matter and "see what could be done".

The Union had, shortly before this, purchased an old house on a good potential building site on the Terrace in Wellington, and moved its head office there. The greater distance from the waterfront was, members believed, more than balanced by the saving in rent payout and the prospect of having a decent Union Building of their own. A Building Fund levy of £1 a year on each member was struck for this purpose in 1958. The same year, several ships' remits raised the question of the desirability of reviving the Union's journal to keep members in closer touch with what the organisation was doing on their behalf, but it was shelved on financial grounds.

Early in 1959, memories of 1951 were reawoken when the watersiders struck in Wellington and Auckland in protest against the breakdown of conciliation proceedings on a claim for a pay rise of 9d an hour, and the Seamen's Union declared its immediate support. "*The seamen are not going to be used by the shipowners to do anything injurious to the cause of the watersiders,*" announced Walsh. The owners had been "brutal, callous, and unrealistic", and seamen were instructed not to handle cars or perishable cargoes on ferries as they usually did when waterside labour was unavailable. Government intervention secured a fairly swift end to the deadlock.

The loss of the *Holmglen* with all hands in mysterious circumstances that year aroused the traditional sentiments of the Union about the inadequacy of official measures taken to ensure the safety of life at sea. An investigation under the Shipping Act produced no answer as to the cause of the tragedy, but the tribunal found it necessary to issue warnings on the granting of deck cargo licences, and expressed the view that ships of this type should carry inflatable life-rafts, that air and sea rescue operations needed improvement, and that power-steering was desirable for all vessels on the New Zealand coast.

A General Wage Order that year won a considerable ad-

vance on existing seamen's rates, and it was obtained without delay because the previous year's agreement had wisely *not* been submitted for stamping by the Court as an Award so as to attract the percentage increase of the Order without waiting until it was due for renewal. A dispute over whether the increase applied also to the so-called War Bonus was referred to the Arbitration Court, with a further small increase as a result.

The invasion of traditional New Zealand trade routes by cheap labour ships (mainly with Asian and Pacific Island crews) was causing increasing concern by 1960. The Union Council that year discussed this problem in particular relation to the *Saracen* and other ships trading between here, the U.S., and the Far East, but concluded that the shipowners' rights were protected by the law, and that "*the solution lay with the lifting of the wages and conditions of all seamen, irrespective of race, colour, or creed*". The same Council meeting sought the assistance of Government in trying to persuade the U.S.S.Co. not to cease the trans-Tasman passenger service after the proposed withdrawal of the *Monowai*.

By 1960, the continual leftward shift in FOL policy had led to a new split in the trade union movement, of a very different kind from that of ten years earlier. This time it was the unions with strongly "moderate" and "right wing" leadership that broke ranks, and the actions of some of their leaders (including P. M. Butler of the General Labourers Union) involved them in denunciations from Walsh which gave rise to a welter of libel litigation. The Seamen's Union contributed generously towards the payment of damages awarded against its General President. The same year, the General Labourers' Union went to the extent of writing to the Seamen's Union and asking for the return of £50 which it had contributed to the Strike Fund in 1951.

With the labour movement again divided, and widespread dissatisfaction at the Government's treatment of its own supporters, the Labour Government was defeated in the elections that year by the National Party under Holyoake.

The Union was affected during 1960 by a number of unofficial strikes by British seamen led by an organised group called the National Seamen's Reform Movement, which (like the Minority Movement of 35 years earlier) was seeking certain alterations to the constitution of the British NUS largely along lines similar to those on which the NZ Seamen's Union

had always been run, including the right of ships' crews to elect their own delegates, and the obligation of branch secretaries to call regular general meetings. Several British ships were held up in NZ waters, and a controversy developed (which held up certain New Zealand vessels) over whether British seamen who sailed while the unofficial strike was in progress were technically "scabs". Despite an obligation to pay outward homage to the NUS as the official organisation of British Seamen, and to restrain New Zealand members from becoming involved in direct action, the Union indicated some sympathy for the British strikers. The FOL even approached the Port Employers Association with a request to refrain from punitive measures against watersiders who had become involved, on the grounds that it would *"only open up an old sore, cultivate resentment, and make it more difficult to create goodwill and harmony in industry generally"*.

The *Kokiri* was held up for 5 days in Wellington early in 1961 in a dispute on manning which eventually spread to the *Kaimanawa*. The Union persuaded the men to sail as the complement was still in terms of the standing agreement, but it attracted bitter criticism from the press for shrugging the incident off as "just a slight misunderstanding".

The new mood of the FOL was shown in 1961 in its reaction to the new Government's threat to increase the wage-earners' cost of living by abolishing food subsidies and its proposal to abolish compulsory unionism. A conference of "key unions" (including the Seamen's Union) called to work out a strategy for defending living standards can be credited with much of the honour for making the Government think twice about subsidies at this stage; and when it declared its intentions of acceding to the demand of its own "backwoods" supporters for the repeal of the law requiring workers covered by an Award to join the appropriate union, Walsh was only just speaking metaphorically when he seized the headlines with a prophecy of "bloody revolution". In fact, provision was rapidly made for negotiating unconditional preference clauses in all agreements, but the FOL conference decided that if union membership was not to be compulsory, then the trade union movement would no longer accept compulsory arbitration either.

The first strike of deck officers since 1890 was called by the Marine Service Guild in 1961 to break a deadlock in wage negotiations with the shipowners, and the Seamen's Union

gave the officers loyal support. Faced by a total stoppage, the Minister of Labour called a compulsory conference which won the officers significant improvements in salaries and conditions.

The following year, import licence difficulties were experienced by the owners in the granting of two conditions conceded in negotiations, namely seats at ships' wheels and coffee percolators in all galleys. Despite a Union directive that the employers should be allowed more time to comply with the agreement, crews on U.S.S.Co. ships in Auckland refused to sail without both seats and percolators, and finally more than a dozen ships were held up for six days. The crews were brought into line only by a threat of penal action by the Minister of Labour. In a general circular to members, Walsh berated those responsible for "the Union being held up to ridicule by the newspaper cartoonists. . . *Our Union cannot afford to be dragged into impossible situations by individuals unable to weigh beforehand the possible consequences.*"

More headlines, however, were made by an official dispute waged by the Union against the incursion of the Danish ship *African Reefer* into the trade between New Zealand and the Pacific Islands in 1962. Learning of the vessel's departure from Samoa with a cargo of bananas, the Union put to the watersiders its case for the retention of job opportunities by New Zealand seamen, and called on them to refuse to unload the ship until the owners had given satisfactory assurances on the subject. As a result, 500 Lyttelton watersiders were on penalty within a few days of the ship's arrival, and the Seamen's Union warned the owners that unless all penalties were lifted there would be a national shipping stoppage. The employers stood their ground, shipping stopped, and the Minister of Labour announced that he would call a compulsory conference provided work was resumed. This proposal was rejected by the FOL executive as amounting to "capitulation".

Finally negotiations were offered on the basis of the ship's unconditional withdrawal from the trade, and agreement was reached that the cargo in dispute would be unloaded but that all future island fruit cargoes for New Zealand would be carried in New Zealand ships when available, and that any proposal to use foreign ships would be the subject of prior consultation between the owners and the FOL.

Press comment on the strike indicated the strong displeasure of New Zealand employers at the new militancy of the FOL,

and the cartoonists were given fresh practice in converting their version of Walsh from the goodie of yore into an incorrigible baddie. This attitude was to be maintained through his part in the FOL's firm support for strikes at Cable's foundry and by railwaymen on the issue of the application of General Wage Orders to ruling rates, and Walsh's last pronouncements on the reality of the class struggle and the urgent desirability of nationalising banking, in his presidential address to the 1963 FOL conference just before his sudden death.

Dan McLeod had lost the Union's general secretaryship in the 1962 ballot to a man who had long been a critic of "moderate" policies, Les Barber; and following Walsh's death, the Union Council elected Tom Martin to act as President, in which capacity he continued until his retirement in 1964, when Bill Martin, a militant who had served on the National Council since 1961, was elected to succeed him. In 1964, the sudden death of Tom Anderson revealed a number of defalcations from Auckland Branch funds extending back over some years, and considerable impetus was given to the election of militants to all Union positions.

From January 1964, the Union started issuing a cyclostyled monthly bulletin to members as a preliminary to the re-establishment of a printed Journal, which made its new debut on May Day 1966. The same year, members gave approval by plebiscite to the long-debated move to amalgamate the federated branches into a single national union.

From 1963 onwards, the Union adopted a positive policy for the protection and extension of job opportunities in face of automation, foreign competition, and sell-out by the Conference-owned U.S.S.Co. An advantageous "swinger" system (with a complete third alternative crew) was negotiated for the new State-owned twin roll-on roll-off ferries, *Aramoana* and *Aranui*. A full-scale campaign was launched for a State owned NZ-manned National Shipping Line, with imaginative use of propaganda gimmicks such as supplying speakers to farming and business organisations, and information stalls at Agricultural and Pastoral shows.

When further U.S.S.Co. ships were withdrawn from the trans-Pacific run in 1966, protest sit-ins of the crews were arranged to give maximum publicity. After the crew of the *Waihemo* were tried and fined for "trespass" after their refusal to leave their ship on pay-off at Dunedin, they conducted

an effective "Freedom Ride" by bus through South Island farming districts. The same year, a Union office was established at the growing port of Mount Maunganui.

The Union's shipping line proposal was adopted as official policy by both the FOL and the Labour Party, and the Union also campaigned vigorously for the joint Labour policy of opposition to the Tory Government's economic measures, which caused mounting unemployment and a sharp increase in living costs in 1966, and to the immoral military intervention in Vietnam. At the same time, the Union was fighting for a stronger delegate system to relieve the work of paid officials and revitalise the democratic structure of the organisation, and for a pension and welfare scheme and other direct economic improvements.

It is impossible to bring the continuing story of the Union's long struggle for the seamen up to the minute. What appears to be of significance today may seem of small moment tomorrow, and vice versa. As Walter Raleigh remarked long ago, *"Whosoever in writing a modern history shall follow truth too near the heels, it may haply strike out his teeth"*.

The important thing to realise is that this is a continuing story. The New Zealand Seamen's Union has been of central importance in the economy of New Zealand and the politics of New Zealand Labour for reasons which still persist. As an island nation, we shall depend on ships for many years to come: as an industry where dangers are always present and basic conditions uniquely harsh despite the vast improvements won by years of struggle, the merchant marine will continue to produce hard-headed and strong-souled men who will make an unusually large impression on the Labour movement; and in our time, when the greed, violence and ineptitude of the profit system are becoming more indecently exposed every day, the Labour movement is obviously destined to play a bigger part than ever before in history.

In this very real sense, we can close the story with the assurance that this is not the end, but the beginning. . . .

A NOTE ON SOURCE MATERIAL.

1. PRIMARY SOURCES.

Throughout the book, extensive use has been made of the *records held at the Wellington and Dunedin offices of the NZ Seamen's Union*. These are an historian's dream, with regard to their comprehensiveness, but a nightmare when it comes to arrangement. They include Minutes, Correspondence, Circulars, extremely useful scrapbooks of clippings, and a treasure-trove of personal papers and jottings of former Union officials (notably W. T. Young and F. P. Walsh) which are of great value in bringing facts into focus. They also include some of the material mentioned below.

Official Publications referred to include Industrial Awards and Agreements, Findings of Commissions of Inquiry under the Shipping and Seamen Act, NZ Parliamentary Debates and Journals, NZ Statutes, and Annual Reports and other publications of the Labour and Marine Departments.

Also consulted were records (many of them held among the Union papers referred to above, and mainly incomplete) of the Maritime Council 1889-90, Cooks & Stewards Union 1886-90, NZ Federation of Labour 1910-13 and 1937-, United Federation of Labour 1913-16, Alliance of Labour 1918-37, and of various Trades Councils and political organisations of the Labour movement including the Liberal and Labour Federation of NZ, the Socialist Party, the United Labour Party, the Social Democratic Party, the NZ Labour Party and the NZ Communist Party.

Many people were interviewed, but special reference should be made to R. Adams, Leslie Barber, K. McL. Baxter, Ben Beeby, Hugh Buchanan, P. M. Butler, W. R. Clarke, E. J. Dyer, E. V. Elliott, F. E. Freeman, G. J. Griffin, Toby Hill, the late J. J. McCarthy, George MacLeod, Tom Martin, Bill Martin, Hon. H. G. R. Mason, Q.C., W. F. Molineux, Douglas Morton, the late Rt. Hon. Sir Walter Nash, C.H., M.P., Richard Ryan, H. G. Scott, and the late F. P. Walsh — all of whom were able to supply significant sidelights on essential details of the history (in some cases dating back as early as the last century) which would have been difficult if not impossible to obtain from other sources.

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3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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C.B.
Wellington,
1968.

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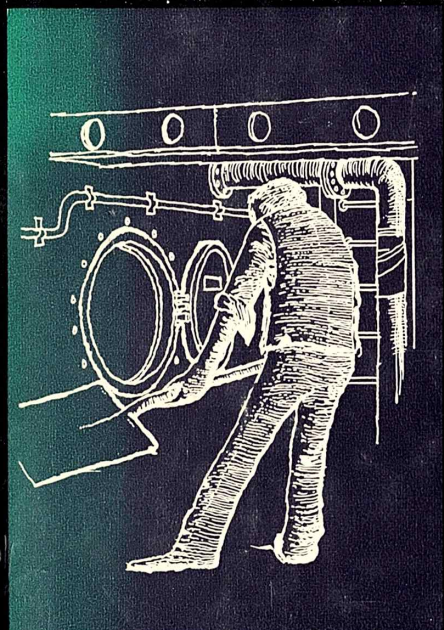
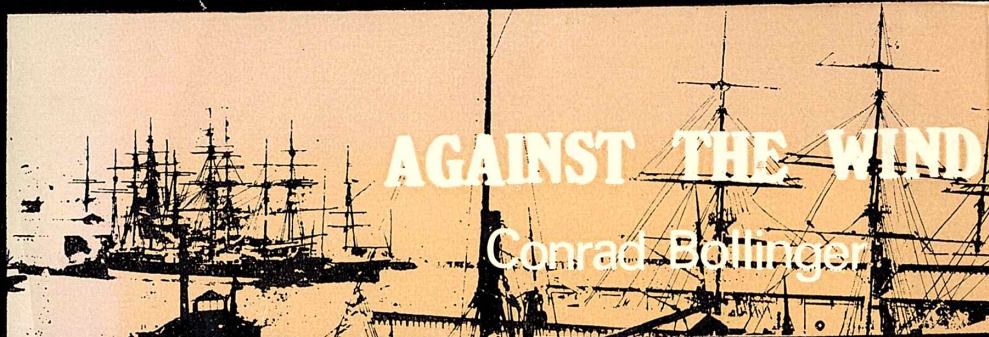
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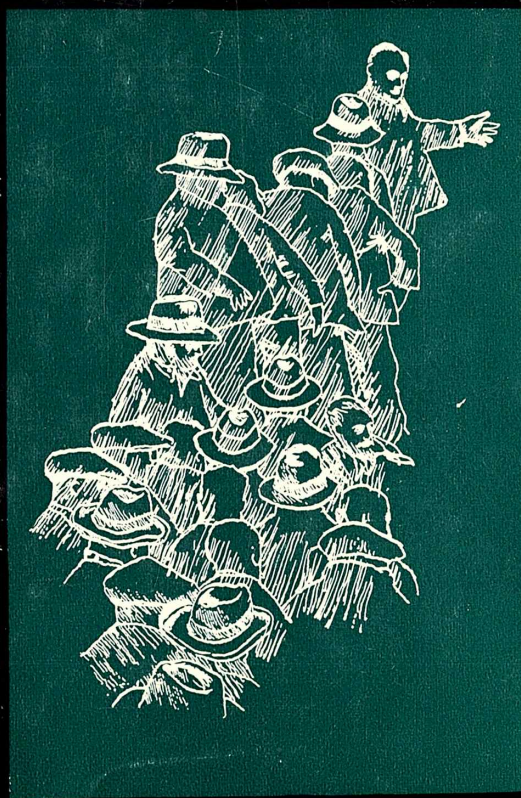
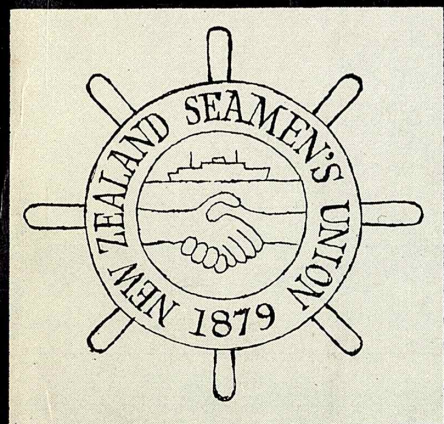
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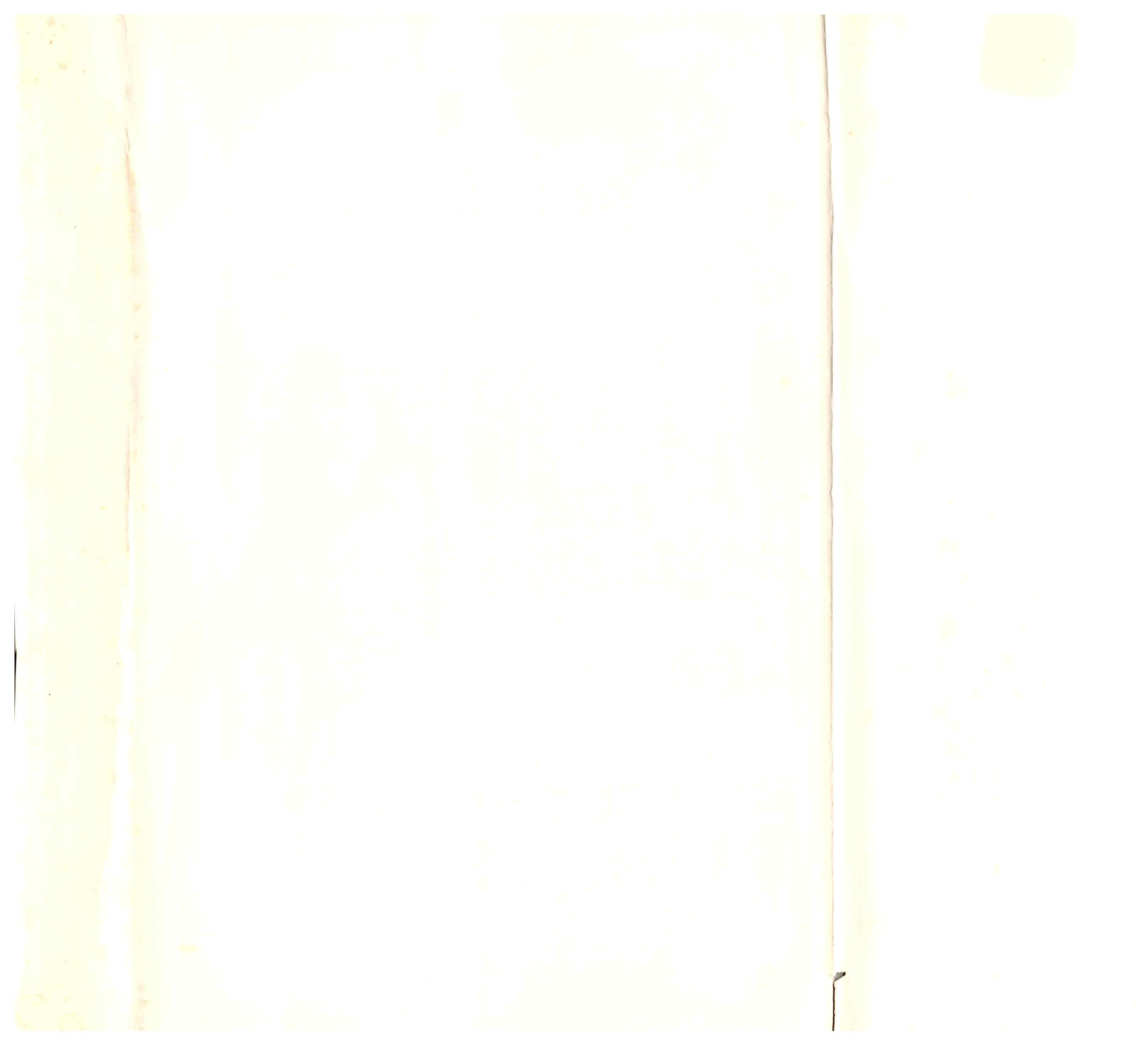


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